ELLERY QUEEN

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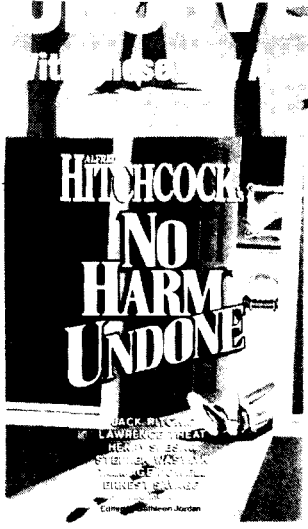

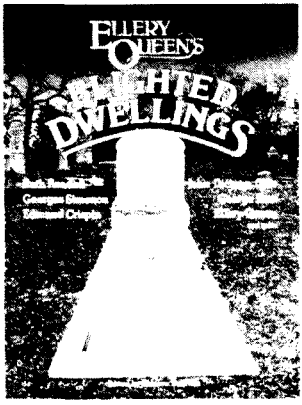

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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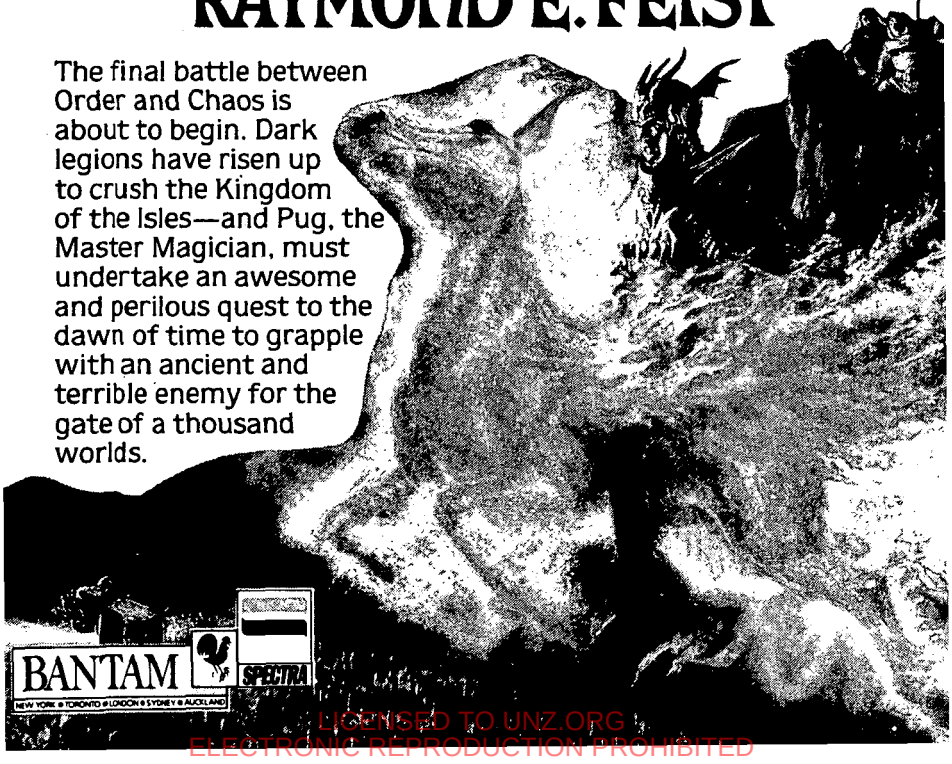

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a ***NEW*** **Kate Fansler story by**

AMANDA CROSS

"What did you think of when you saw the baby and heard that story?" the professor was often asked.

"I thought of Moses," she always answered. "And, of course, of Silas Marner."

An other-worldly story of no small charm and probity, told to us by Kate Fansler's niece Leighton . . .

ONCE UPON A TIME

by AMANDA CROSS

This was the only true story she had ever heard, Kate Fansler used to say, that properly began "once upon a time." Kate, who had never seen the beginning, said it was, nonetheless, as clear to her inner eye as any personal memory, sharp in all its detail, as immediate as sense itself.

The family to whom it happened was named Grant and they were in their summer home in New England. "The King was in the counting house, counting out his money; the Queen was in the parlor, eating bread and honey." That is, the father, as in this context we should call him, had gone into town for the papers; he had money invested and wanted to study the stock-market page. The mother, a college professor, was upstairs in her study, ostensibly writing an article for a conference on the uses of fantasy, in fact reading a novel by Thomas Hardy—which seemed, as she later said, sounding prophetic, to answer to her condition. The children were on the lawn playing a ragged and hilarious game of volleyball.

There were four of them, three boys and a girl, all twelve years of age. The girl and one of the boys were twins; the other two boys were school friends, come for the weekend. They, too, were twins,

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identical as opposed to their fraternal-twin hosts, and the badminton set had been their hostess gift. They had been invited for two weeks, as a favor to their parents, and because the resident twins were judged too self-reliant, and requiring outside stimulation. It had taken a whole day to put up the posts for the net and another day to practice with the rackets and shuttlecocks. The father had pointed out that they could play volleyball with the same net, and had, the next afternoon, provided the ball.

There the four of them were, having both learned and invented the game, playing at it furiously and with much shouting—the girl was as good at it as the boys, and taller than the visiting twins—when one of the visiting twins (they do not remain in this story long enough to be named) shouted, "Look! It's a baby!"

And, as the four of them would remember the scene and tell of it for the rest of their lives, a baby, wearing a diaper and shirt and nothing else, came toddling toward them out of the bushes that lined the property and across the lawn. The baby was about a year and a half old and appeared to have learned to walk only recently. It rocked toward them with that unsteady gait characteristic of babies and laughed, holding out its arms, probably for balance but, as it seemed, reaching toward them. And, what seemed most marvelous, it chortled in that wonderful way of babies, with little yelps of delight as it staggered toward them.

The volleyball players ran down the lawn toward the baby. An adult, even the sort of twelve-year-old girl who played house and dreamed of herself in a bridal gown, would have scooped up the baby. These children simply stood one on each side of her—which two took the baby's hands could never afterward be agreed upon, perhaps they took turns—and slowly moved, midst coos of encouragement, toward the house. The girl then ran ahead—allowing a boy to take the baby hand she held, or so she insisted—to alert their mother. "Ma!" she called. "A baby walked out of the bushes!"

The professor, reading of how Clym Yeobright's mother died, returned to the New England summer afternoon with difficulty. "What do you mean?" she is reported to have said rather crossly. (The story had been retold so often that parts of it became "authentic," as other parts continued to be debated.) She was dragged by her daughter to the window—after having returned her eyes to her book as though her daughter had merely said, "An elephant with wings has landed on the lawn"—where she witnessed the baby's progress toward the house, its hands being held by two attentive boys.

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"Where did it come from?" she not unreasonably asked.

"Just out of the bushes," her daughter answered. The professor rushed downstairs and out onto the road. There was no sign of any car or person. Their house was at the end of a dirt road and any car or person on the road was clearly visible.

"Did you hear a car?" the professor asked. By this time she had reached the baby and held out her arms: the baby walked into them. The professor held and smelt a baby, and put its cheek next to hers, as she had not done for a decade—and then there had been two, which had (as she admitted only to herself and the mother of the visiting twins) doubled the work while halving those intense moments of a mother and baby alone in the entire world.

"We didn't hear anything," the children all said, jumping around her. "Of course we would have heard a car if there had been one." This was so obviously true, the professor argued no further. Someone must somehow have crept along the side of the road, set the baby toddling toward the children, and crept away.

"What did you think of when you saw the baby and heard that story?" the professor was often asked.

"I thought of Moses," she always answered. "And, of course, of Silas Marner."

This latter allusion turned out to be, on the whole, the more appropriate. The baby was a girl, as they discovered after the father, returning with his papers, had been immediately dispatched back to town for diapers and baby food. The mother, with three of the children, the fourth being left downstairs with the baby, searched the attic for a portable crib that had been retained from earlier years for the possible use of visiting young. When the father returned and they had changed and fed the baby, they all sat down at the table, the parents with a stiff drink, and discussed the matter.

"We could advertise," one of the children said. "Or put up a notice like they do with lost cats and dogs." Everyone laughed but, as the parents were quick to point out, no one had a better suggestion. And then the father looked at the professor and said: "Geraldine and Tom."

"Of course," the mother and the home twins said. "But," the children asked, "couldn't we keep her?"

"Our arms are full," the professor said happily. "Besides," she added, "if we'd wanted anyone else, we would have her by now. Our family is complete."

"Geraldine and Tom then," the home twins said, not really disa-

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greeing with their mother. "But," the girl twin added, "she did seem to choose us."

"That's because we were playing on the lawn," her twin said. "It seems a good place where children are playing on the lawn."

"We'll have to tell that to Geraldine and Tom," the father said.

And that was where the "once upon a time" part of the story ended. The professor went away to call Geraldine and Tom, who immediately drove up from New York and looked at the baby as though she had indeed dropped from the skies. "It was *much* better than that," the children insisted. And they had to tell the story again, the first repeat of many. After that, it was courts and judges and social workers and the long, slow process of the law.

Geraldine and Tom, who might as well be known as the Rayleys, were friends of the Grants. Tom was a corporate lawyer who had made partner five years before, and was wildly successful and overworked. Geraldine ran an elegant clothing shop. Unlike those who discovered late in their thirties that they wanted a child, the Rayleys had always wanted one, but it had just never happened. Only lately, consulting doctors and learning that there was no evident reason for their failure, had they decided to adopt. Here they immediately ran into trouble: they were too old and they were of different religions, to mention only the major points emphasized by the adoption agencies. The other markets for babies they had not tried. Tom was one of those whom anything even touching upon the illegal or shady disgusted: he was a person of almost flaming rectitude and integrity, which, as the Grants used to point out to each other, was a pretty odd thing in a corporate lawyer, dearly as the Grants loved the Rayleys.

Geraldine and Tom's desire for a baby seemed to swell with the passing years—almost, the professor used to say, as a mother's body swells with the growing baby inside her. Afterward, many people were to remark how amazingly simple-minded the Grants had been. They had a baby who had toddled toward them out from the mountain laurel. They had friends who longed for a baby. What could be more logical than, pending discovery of the baby's provenance, bringing them all together? "But," people would say later, hearing the story, "the disappointment later for the Rayleys if the baby's mother had been found."

"It was all we could think to do," the professor would say when this point was made. "We all seemed to be acting as though we were

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in some fairy story; well, we were in a fairy story. And it did work out, so we did the right thing, Q.E.D."

For the Rayleys, after many years' experience of the law's delay, got to keep the baby. They adopted her legally, but even before that she was registered for the best school in New York, which Geraldine had attended. She spent her earliest years as a Rayley at an excellent nursery school. The baby, whom they named Caroline, remained as she had first appeared, a laughing, happy child. With adolescence she grew more serious and seemed oddly dissatisfied with her richly endowed life. Fortunately, her parents, as one might expect of a man of Tom's principles and a woman who endorsed them, were not advocates of material indulgence for children. Caroline was kept on a strict allowance and had to account for her evenings. Her parents were of a liberal persuasion, however, and despite all the horrors reported daily of adolescent extravagances, they and Caroline always got on. She went away to college and, eventually, to graduate school. In time, she became an assistant professor at a university in New York. That, of course, was where she met Kate Fansler.

It was, however, not Caroline but her father, Tom Rayley, who first talked to Kate at any length about that amazing scene on the lawn almost thirty years earlier. Caroline and Kate had become friendly, as happens now and then with full professors and much younger assistant professors. As Kate would often say, the friendship is not one of equals, nor can it pretend to be when one friend has such power, direct or indirect, over the destiny of another. All the same, they suited one another. Kate was reaching that difficult point in some lives when, growing older, one finds one's ideas and hopes more in accord with those of the young than of one's own contemporaries. Kate's peers seemed to grow more conservative and fearful as she grew more radical and daring. Not that Kate was then or ever of the stuff from which revolutionaries are made. Perhaps because of her fortunate life, her indifference—either because she had them or did not desire them—to many of the goods of life, she seemed not to barricade herself against disturbing ideas or changing ways. The same could not, surely, be said of Tom Rayley. He came to Kate in fear, though he could scarcely tell her of what. Fear came, he suggested, with his time of life.

"I've turned sixty," he said. "It humbles a man. For one thing," he added darkly, "the body starts falling apart. I've never had very much wrong with me, and all of a sudden I find I have to make a

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huge effort to hold onto my teeth, I've got a strange disease of which they know the name but not a cure, I've also acquired what they call degenerative arthritis, which turns out to be another term for old age, and when I got the laboratory report from my doctor, not only was my cholesterol up, but the lab had noted 'serum appears cloudy,' which didn't bother the doctor but sounded ominous to me. On top of all that, I'd rather Caroline didn't go off to live with her new-found mother or father in a community somewhere full of strange rites and a profound mistrust of life's conventions."

Kate and Tom Rayley had met when Caroline invited Kate home for dinner. Geraldine, like Tom, lived a life in which the strict control of emotion and the avoidance of untidiness, literal or psychological, were paramount. Highly intelligent, they were good conversationalists. Geraldine in particular offering amusing and revealing accounts of the international world of fashion and the Manhattan world of real estate, with which fashion, like everything else, was so intimately connected.

Tom seemed rather the sort who takes in information while giving out as little as possible. He was pleasant but, after the dinner, Kate realized she knew little or nothing about him. Only when she had been, to her astonishment, summoned to a private interview did Kate discover that Tom Rayley was an impressive man, just the sort one would think of as a senior partner in a corporate law firm. Kate wondered if his democratic convictions came from an open mind or his Southern boyhood at a time when all Southerners were democrats. Since Rayley had not turned Republican like so many of his sort, and had settled in New York, she gave him the benefit of the doubt: his was an open mind, fearful perhaps of aging and of loneliness, but not of those chimeras requiring for their alleviation—belief in nuclear weapons, separation of the races, and the strict domestication of women.

Kate was so astonished at his sudden frankness, helplessness, and revelations that she hardly knew what to say.

"What is this disease with a name but no cure?" she asked without really thinking.

"It's a rather personal male disease, apparently of no great significance but calculated to detonate every hideous male fear ever recorded. It's called Peyroni's disease, but whether Peyroni had it, identified it, or dismissed it is unclear. The only problem once it is named, at least in my case, is that my liver responded in a regret-

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table way to the drug supposed to alleviate it. I can't imagine why we're discussing this."

"Because it made you fearful of Caroline's defection. I have to say," Kate went on, "that children seem to me notably unsatisfactory when it comes to the question of their parents. Between those who fantasize other parents and those who seek biological parents, it seems that no one is satisfied. Perhaps we ought to follow Plato's suggestion and have a world where biological parentage is neither known nor significant."

"I'm perfectly aware that my anxiety is irrational and illogical. As a lawyer, if not as a practical realist, how could I not be aware? I think that's why I wanted to talk with you. You, I surmise, deal in stories like this. Caroline admires you and will probably speak to you about her 'original appearance' more intently than she has spoken to anyone else. Also—and I hope you will not desert me totally at this honesty—I did infer that as a sister of the famous Fansler lawyers you would hardly be, shall we say, a disruptive person."

"Not disruptive, but not soothing either. I'm very unlike my brothers in every possible way; perhaps you've heard that. And if you're expressing some naive belief in genes, let me point out the inefficacy of that attitude from an adoptive and loving parent."

"Oh, dear, yes," Tom Rayley said, in no way offended. "But that's part of my fear, you see. How can I say it? That Caroline, discovering something, one hardly knows what, will fall out of our world and into some other world to me unspeakable. And you, at least so far, while in another world, are not unspeakable. I understand your language; I can even learn it."

Kate stared at him. "That is a remarkably intelligent thing to say," she said. "I'm happy to talk with you, though Caroline is my friend, and I shall certainly talk to her also. But I am bewildered: what can you possibly think I can do for you? Isn't this all between you and your wife and Caroline, isn't it all about the life you three have had together for all but a year and a half of Caroline's existence?"

"You've heard the story then, the appearance from the bushes of the laughing child?"

"Yes. I've heard it from Caroline. As she's heard it, and as it has been disputed and refined over the years. But she and I have not talked about it, not as you and I are talking now. It's an amazing story certainly. Almost mythic."

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"Exactly. It's myths I fear, you see. That's the whole point. I don't mind a bereft mother or even father appearing after all these years. I fear the power of the myth. I was wondering if you could detect it: demythologize it. Isn't that what they do in literary criticism these days?"

"All I can do is talk to Caroline, which I do anyway. And to you, if an intelligent question occurs to me. But where can this lead except around in the same circles? Caroline isn't desperate for the truth, resting her whole identity and future life on some revelation. Your fears seem excessive."

"They are. They are the fears that come with the youth of senility, as another lawyer once described it. Will you just accept my trepidation as part of your agenda, one of those 'cases' you think about?"

"I can do that, certainly," Kate said, half amused, half fearful of his intensity, inadequately masked. "What of the mother of the twins, the one who was reading Hardy? Is she still alive?"

"Oh, yes—still a professor. And she's never moved an inch from the story, nor have her children. It's legend now. It's a truth beyond truth."

Kate had intended to mention the conversation with Caroline's father the next day, when she and Caroline walked home together, as was now their custom. They lived within a few blocks of one another but never, to their amusement, met except at the university. Those few blocks separated one New York City neighborhood from another. Caroline, however, mentioned the conversation first. Her father had called her the previous night to report upon the lunch he and Kate had shared.

"The general hope, I'm to gather, is that you'll come to dinner with the parents from time to time and head off the effects of any terrible revelation, or the lack of such a revelation, upon their daughter. I hope you don't feel unduly burdened. In the beginning, my appearance from the bushes seemed a good story—I don't know why it has become so fearsome."

"Stories of that sort do," Kate said. "Like the moment after an electricity failure, when the bright lights go on and the candles are scarcely visible, superfluous. Here we are, talking now about your amazing appearance, while before we used to chat on about everything, nothing outshining the rest."

"Do you mind?" Caroline asked.

"Partly. Partly I want to shout out that it doesn't matter how you

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were born or miraculously shone forth. What matters is that you have a blessed life and the chance for an interesting future. But then I know that's nonsense. The question is, shall you be able eventually to forget the story, let it fade into the general history of things, or shall it keep, as they so wonderfully say in criticism today, *foregrounding itself?*"

"Certainly it will fade if it never changes, never gets any commentary added to it, never gets reinterpreted. Do you think you might be persuaded to go and see Henrietta Grant?"

"The mother of the twins—the one who was reading Hardy? What could I go to see her for? I could hardly request to hear the story again, as one might have asked a bard to recite the lines about Odysseus's meeting with Nausicaa. I mean, if she wants to keep telling it, why not tell it to someone who hasn't heard it before?"

"I don't think she tells it much, or likes to. Mostly others tell it now—her children, me, Mom and Dad. It's just that she's got to be the answer."

"The answer to where you came from?"

"Yes. She's the only one who could possibly know."

"Caroline, that's obviously untrue. Unless she was in two places at once, and nothing in the story allows one to believe that, the only person who can possibly know is the one who set you off toward the volleyball players from behind the bushes and then crept away. And at least with the needle in the haystack, you supposedly know what haystack you lost the needle in."

"You mean someone spotted that house, the children, the geography of the lawn, the dirt road, all of it, and just decided it was a good place to dump a baby."

"That's the likeliest explanation, surely."

"Perhaps. Except, Kate, I know I was a happy child and all that, but if someone the child knows puts her down, is she likely to go running, happily gurgling the while, toward complete strangers in a strange place? I mean, she couldn't have known the children, but mightn't she have known the place?"

"You're looking for a rational explanation, my dear. That is the great temptation with a story like this. As in the Gershwin song, where the Pharaoh's daughter is suspected of being the mother of Moses, the baby *she* found. Surely the whole point about marvelous happenings is that there isn't an explanation—anyway, not one that would satisfy a rationalist. I think that's why your father's so worried. He half hopes for a rational explanation, and half fears the

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lack of one: if you consider yourself miraculous, even miraculously adventurous for a baby, you become other-worldly, part of legend, not simply his child."

"Does that mean I ought to look for a mundane answer or not?"

"Myself, I'd feel tempted to accept it just as it is, be glad you landed in that place, that your parents were there to claim you when called, that you were born at a later age than most in an improbable way. It all seems to me a kind of blessing, better than fairy godmothers around your cradle. But who am I to talk, having always known exactly where I came from, and regretting it the greater part of the time? There is, you see, the danger that you will waste your energies on the past and miss the present and the future. I think that's often a danger, and one worth risking only under the most extreme conditions—total despair or anxiety, for example. What can you learn from the past before you burst upon that volleyball game that's worth knowing? That's what I'd ask myself."

"There's always plain old curiosity."

"So there is. But maybe that's more my problem than yours. After all, I've made curiosity a kind of avocation. If you give me permission, I can promise to be curious enough for both of us."

"Does that mean you might try to discover something?"

"Probably not. It means that I'll go on wondering; you go on living."

"Should your curiosity ever lead to any answers, will you promise to tell me? No, don't protest," Caroline said as Kate started to speak. "Let's make it a bargain. I'll stop thinking about the whole scene, stop even telling it to new people I meet—I'll just say I'm adopted and let it go at that. I think you're right about the past entrenching itself in the present and future. But if I give up this wonderful question, you have, in turn, to promise to tell me if there ever is an answer. Agreed?"

Kate agreed, and with relief. The story was beginning to frighten her in the hold it was getting on Caroline and Tom Rayley. She called Tom Rayley and told him of the bargain, urging him to forget myths and concentrate on his satisfactory daughter.

And there for a time the matter rested.

The resurrection of the myth was an outcome of Kate's meeting with Henrietta Grant. They found themselves together on a panel, both last-minute substitutes. Each, it later transpired, had agreed to fill in as a special favor, Henrietta to the remaining panelist,

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Kate to the man who had organized the panel in the first place. They were introduced five minutes before the panel began, each trying to remember where she had heard the other's name. Both thought of Caroline as the connection during the first paper, and nodded that recognition to one another as the man's words on the New Historicism in the Renaissance prepared the way for Henrietta on the New Historicism in French writing of the Eighteenth Century and for Kate on English writers of the Nineteenth.

"Shall we have a drink," Henrietta asked when they had answered the last of the questions and watched the audience disperse, "or do you feel duty-bound to remain for the next panel?"

"Neither duty-bound nor so inclined," Kate answered. "After all, we are substitutes—it's not as though we had signed on for the whole bit. And even if I had, the truth is I would like to have a drink with you."

They soon settled themselves in the bar of the hotel where the conference was being held. Kate felt she deserved a martini complete with olive.

"How is Caroline?" Henrietta asked. "I understand working with you has been a real opportunity. Not that I've seen her lately."

"I wouldn't call it an opportunity. We're friends, which is a good thing. The fact is," Kate added, as her martini and Henrietta's scotch arrived, "I never expected really to meet you, any more than I expected to come upon two sets of twelve-year-old twins playing volleyball. Or upon Huck and Jim on a raft, if it comes to that. Certain scenes live only in the imagination."

"The twins are not *that* much younger than you," Henrietta laughed. "My twins, at least, have turned out rather well. I've lost track of the other two, so they remain always twelve in my mind. They moved away after that summer."

"I wonder if they tell the story of Caroline's arrival."

"I'm pretty sure they do. They got used to telling it that summer. It's not the sort of story you forget."

"It's all passed into legend by now. How does it feel to be part of a legend?"

"It was an amazing moment. I feel a kind of wonder about Caroline, as though, after that birth, as amazing and as charming in its way as that of Botticelli's Venus, she was bound to be a marvel, do something that would reverberate, become, in her own way, a myth."

"The birth of the hero, as Raglan and others have it, only this

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time a woman hero. More Moses than Effie in *Silas Marner*. And of course the two sets of twins add a note—a kind of amazing circumstance."

"Not really," Henrietta laughed. "Think of the Bobbsey twins. Just a convenient circumstance." Henrietta looked for a moment down at her hands. "I do hope Caroline's stopped brooding about it. I worry about the Rayleys. I worry about her. Like those babies conceived *in vitro*: how can anything in life equal its first moment? I mean, can a life hold two miracles?"

"The whole point of heroic lives is that they do, isn't that so? The miraculous birth, therefore the awful and wonderful destiny. Not that I can imagine that for Caroline, who is such a sane person, which heroes rarely are."

"Male heroes," Henrietta said, and they went on to talk of other things.

But, the ice being broken, they met again from time to time, when Henrietta was in New York or Kate in Boston. And then one spring day Kate, finding herself at Williams College and remembering that Henrietta's country house, on whose lawn Caroline had appeared that long-ago afternoon, was nearby, telephoned on the chance that Henrietta might be there, might ask her to stop by.

"Your sense of geography is rather wonderful," Henrietta remarked. "I'm an hour at least away, and despite the careful directions I shall now give you you will get lost. Stop and telephone again when you realize you've made a wrong turn. And plan to spend the night if you come at all. You'll be far too late to drive anywhere today. I'm all alone, so there's plenty of room. I'll put you in the room where I was reading the day Caroline appeared."

Kate did get lost, did call again, did arrive as the day was darkening, the trees beginning to be outlined against the evening sky. Kate drove down the dirt road on which Henrietta's house stood; was shown the bushes that lined the property at its sides, and the lawn where the badminton net had been. Beyond the lawn was woods. The silence was amazing to Kate.

"Come in," Henrietta said. "We'll sit by the fire and lift a glass to Caroline."

"Has she been back here often?" Kate asked.

"Oddly not. The Rayleys visited with her once, but they wouldn't take their eyes off her. I think they feared she would wander off just as she had come, holding out her hands to someone else. It took them years to believe that Caroline was there to stay. They used to go

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into her room at night to be sure she hadn't vanished into thin air. Eventually Caroline became a real little girl who could be trusted out on her own. Fortunately, she was small when they got her, so she had time to grow into independence and they had time to accept it. The Rayleys are very sound people, which was a great relief."

"You knew that when you called them that day?"

"I knew them well, of course. But all I thought of that day was their longing for a child, and the child's need of a home. I felt, even though I'd just met Caroline, an urgency that she find the right home, not just be adopted by people I'd never heard of, however worthy."

Kate started to ask another question, but restrained herself. The time for questions had passed. The time for answers might come, but only Henrietta could decide that. They sat with their drinks in front of the fire and let the evening darken altogether before they turned on the lights and thought about dinner.

"I've a thick soup I made last night. It improves with age, like the best of us. Will that do? There's also homemade bread and decent wine."

"It sounds like the beginning of another fantasy," Kate said. "I don't get to the country much and rarely am offered homemade soup and bread. Mostly I subsist on nouvelle cuisine and fish, neither of which I especially like. When we're home, we eat omelettes or Chinese food, delivered by an intense young Oriental on a bicycle. This is a lovely change. Can we eat in front of the fire, looking like a scene from a made-for-television movie?"

"We are, I fear, insufficiently rustic."

But nothing else was insufficient. One of those times, Kate thought, when it is all just right and you never quite understand why, except that it was unplanned and in the highest degree unlikely ever to happen just that way again.

Dinner over, they sat sipping their coffee by the fire, dying because Henrietta hesitated to throw on another log—it would commit them to a delayed bedtime. Kate was beyond the most minor decision. It had been a long day, but she was in that odd state of fatigue past weariness. She simply sat. And Henrietta, having, it seemed, decided, threw a large log on the fire.

"I'd better tell you," she said, sitting forward and staring at the fire. "Someone, I suppose, should know. But if I tell you, it will end our friendship. I'll trust you, but I won't want to know you any more. Which is a pity—the world is not that full of intelligent friends."

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Kate couldn't argue with the truth of that. "But if I say don't tell me, shall we go on being friends? Is it my decision?"

"Probably not," Henrietta said, sighing. "In telling you there was anything to tell, I've already crossed that bridge—I've already burned it."

"It's ironic," Kate said. "Like so much else. I guessed, of course—not what you would tell, but that there was something to tell. Once you knew that, we were destined to have only this one night by the fire."

"Truncated friendships are my fate," Henrietta said. "As you shall learn. There never is any turning back." Henrietta paused only a moment.

"It began with a young woman very like Caroline now, a graduate student. We became friends, as you have with Caroline. But it was, or seemed, a more perilous friendship then. Women didn't become close to one another; their eyes were always on the men. I was an associate professor, rather long in the tooth for that, but women didn't get promoted very rapidly in those days. We talked, this graduate student and I, about, oh, everything I seemed never to have talked about. Such talk became more ordinary later, with CR groups and all the rest. It's hard now to recall the loneliness of professional women in those years, the constant tension and anxiety of doing the wrong thing, of offending.

"You have to understand what a conservative woman I was then. If I felt any criticism of the academic world I had fought my way into, I never let it rise to consciousness, let alone expressed it. I just wanted to be accepted, to teach, to write. I liked to tell myself it was simple. And my life was very full. There were the twins. There was my marriage—good then, better now, fine always; we've worked on it, examined our assumptions. But to understand this story, you have to imagine yourself back then, back before Betty Friedan described the 'problem that has no name.'

"I asked my new friend to the country, alone, just as you are here tonight. The children stayed in Boston with their father—he was good about helping me to get away now and then, and they were all involved in Red Sox games and other things I could never pretend interest in. He thought it might be good for me to talk to someone—'girl talk,' he called it. None of us had any decent language for women friends." And Henrietta stopped and began to cry, not loudly, no noise at all. The tears fell silently. "Maybe you can guess the rest," she said.

Kate nodded. "She misunderstood, or you did. She made what used

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to be called a pass. Today I think they would say she came onto you. Were you terrified?"

"It isn't even right to call it a pass. It was a gesture of love. I can see that now. Then, I simply went rigid with terror. And that's what I felt: sheer, paralyzing terror. I knew nothing about women loving women, except that I feared it; we had been taught to fear it. My terror was obvious."

"And she ran away?"

"No. She didn't run. We went on with the evening—we'd arrived in late afternoon—we went on with dinner, we 'made conversation.' I never really understood the agony of that phrase until then. Somewhere in her diaries Woolf talks of beating up the waves of conversation. We did that. Nothing helped—not wine, not food. We said nothing that mattered. The next morning she was gone."

"Gone from graduate school, too?"

"Yes. I had no idea where she was or what had become of her. I tried, discreetly of course, to find out, but she seemed simply to have vanished—the way graduate students do vanish, from time to time. Sometimes they surface again, sometimes not. Once in a while—and this is what terrified me most—they kill themselves."

"But she went off and had an affair with a man."

"You seem to know the story. Is it as ordinary as all that?"

"Not a bit. One doesn't need to be a detective to guess the next step as you tell it. You've just kept it a secret so long."

"It was such a daring plot, you see. I didn't ever want to wreck the magic of that scene by telling anyone. It succeeded beyond my wildest hopes."

"You planned it."

"Of course. She was very clear about not wanting the baby, as she had been clear about having it. A rarely honest woman, for that time. She adored the child, but recognized her impatience, her lack of desire to be a mother, let alone a single mother. She had never told the father she was pregnant; she never told me who he was. I keep saying how different it all was in those days. You have to remember that.

"Caroline was a magic child—that made the plot easier. One of those children who are friendly, open, greet all the world with delight. I made excuses to visit the country house alone. It wasn't hard. I had work to do, and my husband knew the summer with the children here and guests was not an easy time for intense work. Caroline was brought here secretly, for a short time each day. I played with

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her. A game. I was in the house, Caroline was put down by the bushes, and she came toward the house to find me. It's simple, isn't it, when you know?"

"Did your husband know?" Kate asked.

"No. I was terribly tempted to tell him, but it was clear he would play his part better if he didn't know it was a part. His being off the scene was just chance; I didn't plan that."

Kate thought about it a while. "And your friend," she finally asked, "what became of her?"

"She died. In some freak accident. It was horrible. I heard only later, by chance. All the time she was here with the child, she never melted, never said anything meaningful beyond 'Help me' in the beginning, and, just before the end, 'Goodbye.' She crept off through the woods as Caroline moved toward the twins."

"Your plot worked more perfectly than most plots. Like magic."

"Just like magic. I didn't even know the Rayleys would be reached immediately that day or would come so soon. That afternoon's legend has always seemed to me to have some of the qualities of an Homeric hymn. But before and after the afternoon, that's the sorrow. We never made it up; she never forgave me."

Kate could find nothing to say except, "There's Caroline."

"Yes," Henrietta answered. "And she's your friend. Neither of you is my friend."

"That can always change," Kate said. "Maybe this time you'll find the words to change all that."

"Don't tell Caroline," Henrietta said. "Don't tell anyone."

"No," Kate said. "But I shall be breaking a promise to Caroline. I promised to tell her if there was ever an answer. Perhaps one day you'll let me keep that promise, or you'll keep it for me."

"Perhaps. But there are no parents for Caroline to find."

"There is a friendship between two women when that was rare enough. And there is the magic afternoon. That's more than most of us begin with."

Henrietta only shook her head. And after a time, she went to bed, leaving Kate by the fire. In the morning, before Kate left, Henrietta spoke cheerfully of other things. The sun was not yet bright on the lawn as Kate drove away.

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

"Spoiling your honeymoon, is it?" asked Joshua.

There seemed nothing for it but to admit it. "Yes," David told him.

"That's tough. Carol being such a fun girl and all. She gets whingy when things don't go as she wants them to. Have you found that out yet?"

"She does not get whingy. She is the sweetest girl on God's earth and you're making her life a misery."

Whingy—that's British slang for "whiny," pronounced with a short i *and a hard* g. *Rhymes with "stingy."*

Perfect—that's what this story is to the hilarious end, as we have, of course, come to expect of any story by Robert Barnard . . .

PERFECT HONEYMOON

by ROBERT BARNARD

By the time Carol reached her unspoiled Greek honeymoon island, she was beginning to wish it could have been just that tiny bit spoiled. After the ceremony and the wedding breakfast with the speeches, there had been the drive off, the wait at Manchester Airport, the flight, the coach ride from Athens Airport, and now the long ferry trip to Mathos. As the island approached on the horizon, Carol was beginning to decide that an airstrip would have improved the place enormously.

Of course, David had been sweet through the entire trip. But then, knowing she had always been fascinated by the idea of Greece, this honeymoon trip had been his idea. So it was quite natural that he should keep her spirits up by little reminders of the romantic nature

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of the island, the exotic food, the excursions to Crete and Rhodes. And, of course, *the* pleasure of a honeymoon. David had always insisted that the first time would be in the luxury hotel on Mathos. David was old-fashioned. He didn't believe in anticipating marriage, and Carol thought it rather sweet of him. She had anticipated it all too often with other men.

Jutting up like a fairy cake in the middle of a brilliant blue tea-cloth, Mathos assumed more definite shape.

"It's beautiful," said David. "Just perfect."

"It's all been just perfect," said Carol dreamily. "The wedding, the breakfast—everything."

"Almost perfect," responded David. "I only wish Dad could have been there to share it."

David had loved his father, who had died just before they had got engaged. He missed him, and found his new role as head of Lloyd-Jones Agricultural Estates burdensome and worrying. Carol put her hand over his on the prow of the boat.

"Almost perfect," she agreed. "As perfect as we could make it."

As they neared the island, shapes began to appear. A ruined monastery on the hilltop, fishing boats and a pleasure yacht in the harbor, a restaurant with tables outside and red-checkered tablecloths, people on the quayside.

"The local peasants, come to see us arrive," said David. "And a few tourists, I expect."

"We needn't talk to any of them if we don't want to," said Carol. "We have each other."

Suddenly, as the boat was approaching the quay, she was conscious of David's body stiffening.

"It can't be," he muttered. "It's just a— Oh, my *God!*"

His face was purple with rage. Carol had never seen him like that. He was such a gentle soul. She looked up at him with fear in her eyes.

"What is it, David?"

"The *swine*. The absolute swine. Don't you see who that is? It's that rotter, Joshua Swayne."

"Oh, David, it *can't* be."

But it did look very like him indeed. He was standing at the end of the quay, just where the ferry was to dock. He was wearing beautifully tailored white trousers and a dashing shirt open to the waist and knotted at the navel. He was very tanned, very fit-looking, so that even David's rural-proprietor complexion seemed beside his

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that of a country bumpkin. David, somehow, could never be said to look sexy.

"Take no notice of him," said David, red and furious. "He thinks we'll have to acknowledge him, standing there in the middle of the quay. Walk right past him. Ignore him. My God, what a diabolical liberty! Who does he think he is?"

There wasn't much doubt who Joshua Swayne was. Less than a year ago, his—wooing of Carol had been the talk of Merioneth, staple gossip in pubs and tea-rooms around the county. Joshua Swayne was only a greengrocer's son, but he certainly had cut a dash. And Carol had always resisted that "only a greengrocer's son" formulation. Come to that, she was only a schoolteacher's daughter, wasn't she? And if anyone asked her *how* he cut the dash that he did, what he did it *on,* she merely shrugged and said it was none of her business. He was just a very entertaining companion, she said. Oh, yes? said everyone else.

"Just don't look at him," hissed David as the boat docked. "Walk off talking and don't acknowledge his existence. The cad!"

And that's what they did, though somehow it seemed terribly unnatural. They held hands, looked into each other's eyes, and walked straight past Joshua Swayne and on to the bus, where they sat, still talking in unnaturally high voices, still looking anywhere but back to the quay as the boot was loaded with their and the other tourists' luggage and the bus began its steep ascent to the hotel.

Of course, when they got out and walked into the hotel lobby, there he was again. Somehow David had expected it, since the ride had been so short, and Joshua was a notable mountaineer—"the mountain goat" he had been called, somewhat ambiguously, at home. Half expecting it didn't make it any the easier for David to deal with. Carol went on ignoring him studiously, but as they marched up to the Reception Desk, and as he stood there in all his arrogant sexuality, David barked, "Get out of my way," and Joshua moved lithely aside with a pleasant smile.

They made their way to their room, watched from the open, sun-drenched doorway by Joshua, who seemed part, or product, of the sun itself. Once safely inside the bedroom, they sat on the bed and looked at each other.

"This is *dread*ful," said Carol. "Just unimaginable. He has no *right.*"

"Of course he has no right. You threw him over for me, and there's an end of it."

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"Actually, I threw him over well be*fore* I got interested in you," said Carol. And indeed there had been all of a fortnight's gap before she started going out with David. "He acts as though he owns me."

"I just can't see what's to be done."

"We could move to another hotel."

"And have him come after us? We'd become laughing stocks."

David was very conscious, always, of anybody laughing at him.

"But that means sticking it out here." Carol giggled shyly. "Of course we could stay in our room the whole time, and that would be nice. But we have to have meals."

David looked around the room.

"No sign of room service. Anyway, I'm *damned* if I'm going to avoid the dining room because he'll be there."

"No. Why should we? Though it will be awkward."

David looked very glum.

"He's spoiled everything. You know, what I'd like to do now is—well, you know. But I just don't want it to happen in this sort of atmosphere. We've got to get this sorted out one way or the other."

"Exactly. Because if we can't get it sorted out, we might as well go home and—start the marriage there." Carol looked at her watch. "Actually, it's lunchtime now. And after all that traveling I *am* pretty hungry."

They both showered, separately and modestly, and then they put on clean summer clothes, crisp and delightful on the body, clothes in which David looked *almost* handsome, Carol thought, and definitely better than presentable. Then they went, holding hands, down to lunch.

He wasn't there when they went in, and for that they were grateful. But they had hardly stewed over the menu and given their orders to the waiter when they saw him come in the door from the foyer. The waiter tried to steer him to what was obviously his usual table, but they saw something pass from hand to hand and he came over and sat himself at the next table.

"Good morning, again," he said cheerfully. "You really have chosen well, you know. Mathos could hardly be bettered for a honeymoon island. You're going to be awfully happy here."

David choked, and Carol managed a few reluctant murmurs of reply for the benefit of other lunch-takers around them. Joshua had already turned to the waiter and begun ordering in what sounded to David like idiomatic Greek. He might have been the cookery correspondent of a glossy magazine.

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It was a ghastly meal. Everything they said could be heard by him at the next table. They scampered through their three courses, and as they were getting up Joshua said: "Enjoy your afternoon. There are some quite fabulous walks around here. Just give me the nod anytime you feel like it and I'll show you around."

David and Carol choked with irritation. When they got to the door, David made a decision. He left Carol there and marched back down the dining room.

"Look here," he said, "just what is your game?"

"Game, old man? I don't quite understand you. I'm here on holiday like yourselves—well, *almost* like yourselves."

"You're not going to tell me this is a coincidence."

"All right. I won't try and tell you this is a coincidence."

"You've come here deliberately because you found out this was where we were coming."

"The island has many attractions," said Joshua with a catlike smile. "And that, of course, was among them."

"If you think you're going to make us turn tail and flee, you'll be disappointed."

"On the contrary, I would be disappointed if you did. It would cause me so much hassle. But I know your sturdy Welsh stock, David, and I knew you're not a quitter."

"I knew you were a cad," David said, his voice rising, so that people began to look at him from tables quite far away and he blushed and reduced it to a hiss again, "but I never thought you'd want to cause Carol this sort of distress."

"Is she distressed? I don't know why she should be. Most women like having two men at their beck and call."

"You are *not* at her beck and call!"

"I certainly am, supposing she decides to beck or call."

"If you continue to force yourself on us in the way you have been doing today—"

"Yes?"

It was a thoroughly irritating question, and insolently delivered, the eyebrows raised quizzically. Because what, after all, could David threaten him with?

"I'll not answer for the consequences," David spluttered, and marched out of the dining room.

The consequences, unfortunately, were mostly on David and Carol's heads. David said he really didn't want to—start the honeymoon while all this was hanging over their heads, and Carol said

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that really she didn't want to, either. They sat in their hotel room and talked things over, and Carol said that at least they did *have* each other to chew things over with, and that what they were really facing was the first crisis of their married life. If they could face up to all the others as calmly, things wouldn't work out too badly, would they?

The trouble was, thought David, that facing up to a marriage crisis was one thing, and that could be done calmly and with dignity, but facing up to Joshua Swayne was quite another matter. The mere thought of Joshua made him panic, as facing up to the farm workers had made him sweat in the first weeks of running the Estates after his father's death. It was the thought of him and Carol. Well, least said, soonest mended, but somehow David couldn't manage to put that thought out of his head.

They weren't going to be imprisoned in their room, that was for sure. About three o'clock they went out for a walk, and they probably would have enjoyed it if they hadn't constantly been glancing nervously around to see if they were being shadowed. The island was beautiful, with sloping, fertile pastures, and with cliffs stretching dazzlingly up skyward. Luckily they were young and fit, and David in particular was used to climbing. But as they approached their hotel, the inevitable happened. Joshua was suddenly to be found, insinuating himself beside them.

"Don't you agree it's a beautiful island?" he said. "I thought I'd let you enjoy it on your own. Went down to Nimos, didn't you? And then up the hill to the coastguard station, then down the cliff path and back here?"

So he had been following them the whole time. David was livid. He drew Carol aside. "You go on ahead, darling," he said. "I'm going to deal with this louse once and for all."

It didn't occur to David, in sending Carol on ahead, that she really had a lot more experience in dealing with this louse than he had. Probably even if it had occurred to him he would not have let her do the dealing.

"Now let's get this straight," he said, turning to the imperturbably smiling and disgracefully tanned Joshua. "This has got to stop."

"Spoiling your honeymoon, is it?" asked Joshua.

There seemed nothing for it but to admit it.

"Yes."

"That's tough. Carol being such a fun girl and all. She gets whingy

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when things don't go as she wants them to. Have you found that out yet?"

"She does not get whingy. She is the sweetest girl on God's earth and you're making her life a misery."

"Now that I would hate to do. If only for old time's sake, I'd like her to be happy. Just for her, David—just for her—I might be willing to come to an accommodation."

David was bewildered. Was he offering to seek alternative lodgings?

"I don't get you."

"I might, out of consideration for her, be open to an offer."

David was outraged. "Do you mean you would accept money to go away?"

Joshua shrugged, still smiling. "Market forces rule. I'm sure you've always believed that. You voted for Thatcher last time, didn't you? The plain market fact is that you have money, and I want money."

"You cad! You unadulterated bounder!"

"Whereas the service that I can perform for that money is the service you want above all things: I can go away."

"This is unbelievable!"

"You'd better believe it, boyo! I tell you what: you go back to your room and think it over. I can see it's a new idea for you. Never too quick to take in new ideas, are you, David? Then when you've thought it over, talked it over with Carol, you can come up with a sum, and we can talk it over. How about half past six, up near the coastguard station? There we'll be away from anyone English who might overhear. We wouldn't want either of us to be embarrassed, would we?"

David was, as Joshua implied, not the quickest thinker in the world. He thought over the proposal, and he talked it over with Carol, but after all that he still found the idea utterly distasteful. But he still couldn't think of any alternative to going along with it.

"I think we ought to agree," he said finally. "No, not *ought* to agree—it's a disgusting suggestion—but I think we simply have to."

"I think we have to, too," said Carol. "If we don't, then the honeymoon is ruined, and that would be a terrible start to our marriage. And, after all, it is only money. It's not nice to be swindled, that's for sure, but on the other hand I don't think we should make money some kind of god. We've got enough, heaven knows."

So six-fifteen saw David toiling up the hill again, once more leav-

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ing Carol out of things in that old-fashioned, gentlemanly way he had. Carol had been reluctant, in any case, to witness a transaction which might almost seem to an outsider to be a sale or auction of herself. David agreed with Carol that they should not make a god of money, but he determined not to offer to start with anything like the sum that he might be prepared to fork out after negotiation.

His heart leapt with justified outrage when he saw the figure of Joshua Swayne on top of the cliff, silhouetted against the setting sun. He was standing there, rather dejected-looking, and perhaps feeling in his heart the jerk his conduct was proving him to be.

"Well," said David, a bit puffed, when he drew near to Joshua. "I've thought it over."

"Yes?" said Joshua, low. David modified his voice, too.

"I think we might say three hundred pounds."

"What?" shouted Joshua, suddenly raising his voice, and looking fiercely at David.

"I think we might say four hundred pounds," yelled David in return.

"You swine!" shouted Joshua, in a voice that seemed to carry all over the island. "You absolute cad! My God, you're trying to *buy* me—you think I'm here to screw money out of you! I'm not going to stand for this!"

David didn't sense the first blow coming. This was not at all what he had come prepared for. When Joshua engaged him in a close wrestling grip, he was too breathless to put up more than a token resistance, and when further blows rained down on him, and they moved closer and closer to the cliff's edge, he could no more avoid the fate he saw coming than can a man in the maelstrom. As he was thrown, head first, over the cliff he knew his end was a second away and yet he still did not understand. His overmastering emotion as he fell was bewilderment.

It had all worked out very nicely indeed, Carol considered, as she flew home, dressed in deep black (the Greeks were very good at black, they wore so much of it). She was accompanied by the coffin, but she thought very little of it. That part of her life was over and done with.

The coastguards, whom Joshua had so cleverly ascertained spoke English, had testified to the offer of money, and the sense of outrage felt by the accused. The Greek police, being natural romantics and admirers of Milord Byron, had felt considerable sympathy for the

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young man (did he not resemble in many ways the familiar features of the liberating English Milord?) who had suffered so much at being rejected by the woman he loved, and who was only making a desperate attempt at the very last moment to win her back. To be offered money to go away was the ultimate insult to his tender heart. The Greeks, in any case, take a very lenient view of *crimes passionels*. That, of course, was why Carol had maneuvered David into choosing Greece. She had been assured by the Greek lawyer she had retained for herself (though she had been very cunning about not seeming to ask for any reason beyond indignation and pity for the fate of her husband) that Joshua Swayne was unlikely to serve more than five years. ("Alas, Madame, but that is how we regard these things in this country.")

Five years! It seemed a lifetime. But her heart swelled with pride as she thought what Joshua was willing to suffer, for her, and for the money. For money there would be, now, in abundance. She did not expect to be well received by David's mother, or his sister, but really there was nothing whatsoever that they could do. From now on, she was effective head of Lloyd-Jones Agricultural Estates. She had always fancied herself running a big business enterprise. When Joshua got out, they would either marry in North Wales and outface the talk, or she would sell up and they would branch out into something more glamorous than large-scale farming. The world was all before them.

Joshua was worth waiting for. That she knew for certain. It was very unlikely that she would meet anybody in the next five years who would force her to break her compact with Joshua. She was quite certain she would keep faith with him. Almost a hundred percent certain. It was more than probable that she would.

And if she didn't, of course, there was nothing whatsoever that *he* could do, either.

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The note was block-printed in a childish manner to disguise the handwriting. There was no signature.

"This came in yesterday's mail," Sarah said. "There was another last week that I burned in the stove. You've helped the police solve mysteries, Sam. I want you to find out who's writing these things . . ."

THE PROBLEM OF THE CURING BARN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"They've grown tobacco along the eastern bank of the Connecticut River for as long as anyone can remember," Dr. Sam Hawthorne said, pouring a bit of libation for his guest, "but it wasn't until Jasper Jennings came to Northmont during the depths of the Depression that anyone thought seriously about growing it in our part of the state. And that was the beginning of one of the most baffling mysteries I ever came across . . ."

It was in September of '34 that the first decent crop of the Jennings Tobacco Company was ready for harvesting just a few miles north of town. The papers were full of news of the burning of a ship called the *Morro Castle* off the coast of New Jersey at the time, so nobody took much notice of Jennings' accomplishment. I'd met Jennings when he first came to town and had become something of an unofficial company doctor, treating the occasional cases of sunstroke or dehydration among his poorly paid field hands. Once, in midsummer, he'd shown me around the place, guiding me through the acres

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of tobacco plants growing beneath great canopies of cheesecloth. He was a thin, hawk-faced man who walked quickly with a bit of a stoop. I had trouble keeping up the pace and he chided me about it. "You need more exercise, Doc. You're twenty years younger than me and you can't walk these fields without gettin' winded."

"I am out of condition," I agreed. "What are these canopies for?"

"By shading the plants with cheesecloth we can produce the large thin leaves that are perfect for cigar wrappers, which is what this soil's best for. When the plant is mature, when the middle leaves are about ripe, we cut the plant off close to the ground and allow it to wilt. Then it's removed to the drying shed until it's ready for curing."

"I know a little about curing," I joked.

Jennings merely stared at me. "The curing generally takes about six weeks, and we help it along with fires if the weather gets too damp. This is the curing barn over here." He led me to a long structure with gaps in the perpendicular siding every few feet, as if someone had run out of boards when it was being built. "Those allow for air curing," Jennings explained.

"The worker I treated for the cut hand—"

"Roy Hanson."

"Hanson, yes. He was cutting the plants with an axe and hit his hand instead. But it's too soon for harvesting."

"He wasn't harvesting," Jennings said. "At this time of the season, when the flowering buds appear, we cut off the tops to concentrate growth into the leaves. That's what Hanson was doing when he hurt his hand."

It was the worker's injury that had brought me to the tobacco farm, and after my chat with Jasper Jennings I stopped inside the barn to see how Hanson was coming along. His right hand was still heavily bandaged, but he was able to help assemble the racks that would be used for drying later on.

"How's it feel?" I asked as I unwrapped the bandage.

Hanson was a young man in his twenties with a short haircut and the solid body of an athlete. He'd told me at the time of the injury that he'd done a little amateur boxing, and he was concerned this meant the end of it. "Not bad. It hurts a little at night, though."

"It's healing nicely," I said, removing the last layer of bandage. "Let me put a fresh one on."

"Will I be able to box again, Doc?"

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"I don't see why not. But you're lucky. You almost lost half your hand."

Sarah Jennings, Jasper's wife, came into the barn with a pail of water and a dipper. "Anyone for a drink out here? How about you, Sam?"

"Thanks, Sarah. I'll pass it by for now," I said.

She was a bright, intelligent woman who moved easily among the men, laughing and joking with them but managing to fend off their occasional advances with ease. I didn't doubt that Jasper would have killed any man he found molesting her, but there didn't seem too much danger of that.

I walked back to the farmhouse with her, to the driveway where my new car was parked. "What's that?" she asked. "An Oldsmobile? You used to go in for sporty cars."

"That was in my younger days," I told her. "Once you pass thirty-five, you have to think about settling down."

"The way to settle down is to get married."

"Maybe I'll think about that, too, if the right woman comes along."

That was my last visit to the Jennings tobacco farm for several weeks. Roy Hanson was able to come to my office the next time his bandage needed changing, and after that I told him he could care for it himself. Soon there'd only be a scar to remind him of the accident.

"He's a nice young man," my nurse April said after he left.

"He wants to be a professional boxer. Can you imagine such a thing?"

"It's difficult for young people to find regular work these days."

"He's not that much younger than we are. Said he was twenty-seven."

"He can't be earning much out at Jennings' tobacco farm," April said, watching him through the window as he walked to the hospital parking lot. "He's got a girl waiting for him in the car."

"Oh?" I stepped over beside her. "That looks like Sarah Jennings."

"Really?"

"I can't be sure at this distance. Maybe she brought him along to help with the weekly shopping."

April went back to her desk as I watched them drive away. "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you," she said. "Sheriff Lens called to invite you to dinner tonight."

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"I'll give him a call," I told her. My practice was slow that summer and Sheriff Lens and his wife were always good company.

It was on a warm afternoon in early September that I was next summoned to the Jennings farm. Oddly enough, this time the summons came from Sarah Jennings, and it didn't involve matters of health. She met me in the front parlor of the farmhouse, and the first thing I noticed was that the laughter seemed to have gone out of her eyes. She unfolded a piece of paper and handed it to me. "Would you read this, Sam?"

I skimmed the note, which was block-printed in a childish manner to disguise the handwriting: I KNOW WHAT YOU AND ROY HANSON ARE DOING IN THE CURING BARN. THE WRATH OF GOD WILL PUNISH YOU FOR YOUR SINS. There was no signature.

"This came in yesterday's mail," she said. "There was another last week that I burned in the stove. You've helped the police solve mysteries, Sam. I want you to find out who's writing these things."

"That's a bit out of my line, Sarah." I hesitated and then asked, "Is there any truth to it?"

Her face flushed scarlet. "Of course not. Roy is a nice young man and I'm friendly toward him like I am to everyone. These letters are a sick perversion."

"You must have some suspects in mind."

"No, I don't. I can't imagine anyone who could hate me this much."

"Have you reported it to Sheriff Lens?"

"What is there to report—two poison-pen letters? I don't even know if it's a crime to send them."

"Does Jasper know?"

She looked away. "I haven't told him. He has so much on his mind right now, trying to harvest his first tobacco crop. I was hoping you could identify the sender and we could put an end to it."

"How? Suppose I could identify the person who wrote this, what would you do next?"

"I—I suppose I'd confront him or her and demand an apology. If it's one of our hands I'd fire him."

"How many people do you have working here?"

"There's Belinda in the house. She helps me with the cooking and cleaning. Jasper has a half dozen farmhands like Roy who work here full time. The rest are migrants just hired to help with the harvest."

I got to my feet. "I can't promise anything, Sarah, but I'll take a

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look around. Who might have seen you and Hanson alone in the curing barn?"

"No one! We've never been alone out there."

"When I was there earlier this summer you brought some drinking water out—do you always do that on warm days?"

"Sometimes," she admitted. "Not always."

"Hanson was working alone inside that day because of his hand."

"Well, yes. But there are usually others around."

"I think you're overly alarmed about the notes. The person who wrote them may be an enemy, but it's an enemy who's afraid to take any more direct action. After all, what could they do besides send you another letter?"

She had an answer for that. "Send my husband a letter."

Belinda Sanchez was a large half-Mexican woman who'd been cooking and caring for the Jennings family for nearly a year. I found her in the kitchen with the Jennings' only child, Matthew, an introspective sixteen-year-old who hadn't yet decided whether his father's business was for him.

"Hello, Matthew. How's it feel to be back to school?"

He gave me a sulky look. "Dad's keeping me out till next week, to help with the harvest."

"I thought it would be finished by now."

"Slow season," Belinda chimed in like one of the family. "All that cool weather in June set everything back."

"I'm looking for Roy Hanson, to check on his hand. Have you seen him around?"

"His hand's all healed," Belinda said. "He's out cuttin' tobacco leaves with the others."

I left the house by the back door and walked past the curing barn to the tobacco fields. The cheesecloth canopies were down now and all along the rows of broad-leafed plants, men in undershirts and dungarees were swinging axes. Jasper Jennings was among them, demonstrating to one of the migrant workers the proper method for lifting the broad leaves with one hand while cutting the stalk close to the ground.

I found Hanson hanging the newly cut leaves on drying racks. Other leaves, cut days earlier and now dry, were being moved into the curing barn. "How's the hand coming along?" I asked him.

"Good as new, Doc." He held it up, flexing his fingers to demonstrate.

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"I'd like to speak with you for a minute if you've got the time."

"Sure."

"You know, this is a small town and gossip gets started mighty easy." I glanced around to be certain we weren't overheard. "There's been some talk about you and Mrs. Jennings."

"What? What kind of talk?" He seemed genuinely bewildered.

"Have you been alone with her in the curing barn?"

"Gosh, no—there's always people around. Mr. Jennings is always around somewhere. Who's been telling you these things?"

"That's not important. Just watch your step, Roy. Some people delight in causing trouble."

"Thanks for the tip," he said.

He went on with his work and I strolled farther down the line of workers, watching as they chopped at the stalks of the tobacco plants. Some of these people, I knew, could barely read and write. It wasn't very likely that any of them had written the poison-pen letter Sarah had shown me. More likely it was a neighbor, or someone who called on them regularly. However, there was one other possibility worth looking into.

When I returned to the house, I found Sarah watering the plants on the front porch. "Did you learn anything?" she asked.

"Very little. I talked to Hanson, but he acted innocent. I didn't specifically mention the anonymous letters, just said there'd been some talk."

"Of course he acted innocent—he is innocent! There's not a shred of truth to those letters."

"I wonder, Sarah, could you arrange for me to stay for supper tonight? I'd like to see these people in a more relaxed atmosphere."

"That would be no trouble at all. Belinda always serves enough food for a small army."

The migrant workers and some of the regulars ate together out in the bunkhouse where they slept. Because Hanson and one other employee—Jennings' field boss, Frank Prescott—lived in town, they ate with the family. It was nearly seven by the time the day's chores were completed and I joined them at the dining-room table—Sarah, Jasper, and Matthew plus Hanson and Prescott.

It quickly became obvious that Jennings used the evening meal to review the day's events with his field boss. Prescott was a thin but wiry man in his forties, who spoke only in response to Jennings' questions.

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"How'd it go today, Frank? Them migrants getting the crop in? Are you on schedule?"

"Could use a few more," Prescott replied.

Jennings turned to Hanson. "Think you could round up a few hoboes who want a day's work, Roy?"

"There are always a flock of 'em over by the tracks. I don't know how good they'd be at harvesting tobacco—"

"As good as the crew we got," Jennings assured him. "I had to teach one fella how to swing an axe today."

Hanson promised to round up some day laborers on his way to work the following morning and the conversation shifted to the size of the crop. "Ain't as big as we hoped for," Frank Prescott admitted, "but this is only the first year. It's bound to get better."

Belinda finished off the meal with some delicious apple pie, then Jennings went outside with Prescott and Hanson to check on the racks of drying leaves. The radio had said there were showers in the area and Jennings wanted to be certain the newly cut tobacco was under cover. I went upstairs with Matthew to a typical boy's bedroom crowded with college pennants and piles of dirty clothes. An unfinished game of Monopoly was on the floor, and a bunch of blue balloons from a recent carnival floated against the ceiling. On his cluttered dresser were a couple of 4-H Club ribbons, testifying to at least a little gainful effort.

"I wanted to talk with you alone, Matthew," I said.

"What about?" he asked sullenly. "I'm not sick."

"I was wondering about Frank Prescott and Roy Hanson. You must see a lot of them, and they eat dinner with the family every night. Do you like them?"

He glanced away. "Yeah, they're okay."

"Do they talk to you much?" I motioned toward the Monopoly board. "Do they play games with you?"

"Roy comes up here once in a while. He likes Monopoly. I don't see much of Mr. Prescott except at dinner and in the field. He's a lot older than me."

"He seems sort of quiet," I suggested. "Doesn't say much."

"Oh, he talks when my dad's not around."

"Does your mother like them—Roy and Mr. Prescott?"

"I guess so."

I'd been seated on the edge of the bed while we talked. Now I stood up and said, "Maybe we can have a Monopoly game ourselves someday soon. Would you like that?"

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He shrugged. "I guess so."

"Good. Matthew, if you ever have any problems I'd be glad to talk them over with you. They don't have to be medical problems. I'm a good listener. I was your age once—I know there are sometimes things you don't like to talk to your folks about."

He didn't answer, so I went back downstairs. Jasper Jennings was in the kitchen. "Something wrong with the lights in the curing barn," he announced. "I think it's a fuse." He rummaged around until he found a box of fuses, then went back outside. It was dark now, though near the house I could see Prescott carrying some logs to one of the woodpiles.

"They'll be startin' a fire soon," Belinda told me. "With rain threatening, they gotta make sure the harvested leaves stay dry." She opened the icebox and started chipping away at a new block of ice.

"You really have your share of work," I remarked, "cooking for the family and all the others, too."

"I don't mind it." She went on chipping ice.

"Do you like Roy Hanson?"

"Sure. Everybody likes Roy."

"Is Mrs. Jennings around?"

"I think she went outside," Belinda said.

I went out the back door and started across the barnyard. The lights hadn't yet been restored in the barn, but through the breaks in the wall I could make out the occasional shadows of men moving around. "Hello!" I called out.

"We're in the barn, Doc," a voice answered. I thought it was Prescott.

I entered and started making my way through the maze of curing racks, smelling the pungent odor of the tobacco. The place was in darkness, with only the lights from the farmhouse on one side and those in the bunkhouse on the other giving some slight illumination, and as I moved farther in among the racks even this slim light was blotted out. "Hello!" I called again.

"Over here," Jasper Jennings said.

I made my way toward his voice.

Suddenly there was a gasping, gurgling sound that chilled my blood. "What's happening?" I asked, moving faster and running into a rack of tobacco leaves that scattered and fell in my path.

The overhead lights went on, and I saw Prescott and Hanson about twenty feet in front of me by the fusebox. Jasper Jennings was sprawled on the dirt floor in front of them. His throat had been cut.

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He died with his eyes open and beseeching, as if begging for help I was too late to give him.

I worked over Jennings for several minutes but there was nothing I could do to restore his life. "What happened?" I asked the two men standing helplessly above me. "Who killed him?" I could see no sign of a weapon.

Frank Prescott was shaking his head in bewilderment. "Damned if I know, Doc. I just heard him give this—sound and he fell over. We were all standing close enough to touch each other."

"All right," I said, "empty out your pockets. I need to make sure neither of you has a knife."

I checked their pockets, then frisked them quickly as I'd seen Sheriff Lens do on more than one occasion. There was no weapon.

"What's going on out here?" It was Sarah Jennings, coming toward us down the aisle of the barn. "Is that Jasper on the floor!"

"Go back to the house and call the sheriff," I told her. "There's been an accident."

"Jasper—"

I went to her and placed a comforting arm around her shoulders. "I'm terribly sorry, Sarah. He's dead."

She screamed and half fell.

I helped her back to the house and told Belinda to call Sheriff Lens. Matthew had come downstairs and was standing ashen-faced in the kitchen. "You've got to be a brave young man now," I told him. "Your mother needs all the help and strength you can give her."

We left Jennings where he was until the sheriff arrived. He examined the body quickly and then turned to me. "At least it's not one of those locked-room murders you're always gettin' involved with, Doc. This barn's got more holes than a rusty sieve. What happened—did they run out of lumber?"

"It's a curing barn," I explained. "The dried tobacco needs air circulating around it. There's also fire curing, using smoke to do the job, but most American tobacco is air cured."

"You sound like an expert on the subject, Doc."

"Jennings gave me a lecture tour here this summer."

"Which of those two killed him—Hanson or Prescott?"

"I hate to tell you this, Sheriff, but they both swear neither one could have done it. Their hands were empty when they entered the barn with Jennings. Hanson was wearing a loose jacket but it has

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no pockets. I searched them both within seconds of the killing and neither one had a weapon. There's no weapon on the barn floor or among the racks of tobacco."

"That don't mean a thing, Doc. You don't need a knife to cut a throat. I know of cases where it's been done with a thin wire."

"So do I, but not this case. If he was garroted there'd be a mark all around his neck. And he didn't walk into a hanging wire because he was standing still at the time."

"An angler could cast a sharp fishhook—"

"In the dark, Sheriff? With him standing between two other people? Besides, look at that cut across his throat—it's much too smooth to have been made by something like a fishhook. The sharpened blade was drawn quickly across his throat in one firm motion, from right to left."

"What does that mean?"

"In wounds like this the killer almost always stands behind the victim and reaches over his shoulder. If he's in front of the victim, the victim will reflexively jerk backward at the first touch of the blade to his throat. Also, of course, standing behind protects the killer's clothes from the blood."

"What are you tryin' to say, Doc?"

"The killer stood behind him, reached over his left shoulder, and cut his throat with a quick pull of the blade from right to left. You can see that from the wound. It means the killer is left-handed."

Sheriff Lens looked grim. "Come on, Doc. We're checkin' out everyone on this farm."

The following hour was frustrating for us both. Sarah and Matthew Jennings were both right-handed, as was Belinda. Roy Hanson and Frank Prescott were both right-handed, too. The only left-handed people on the farm proved to be two of the migrant workers in the bunkhouse. But the migrants and the live-in employees had been still at the dinner table when the murder occurred. They all swore no one had left the table in the bunkhouse for even a moment.

Sheriff Lens was exasperated. "Look here, Doc, Hanson and Prescott swear neither of them had a weapon, and they're sure they'd have heard another person approaching. Sarah and her son and the cook were outa sight of each other, without alibis, but all five of them people are right-handed. And everyone in the bunkhouse has an ironclad alibi."

I went outside to speak with Hanson and Prescott again. Sheriff

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Lens had a deputy searching the floor of the barn in case a knife had been hurled away after the crime, but I was pretty sure he wouldn't find anything.

"Tell me something, Roy," I said. "You were going to hire some hoboes as day workers in the morning. How far away is their camp by the railroad tracks?"

"About a mile, I reckon." He looked puzzled.

"Might one of them have wandered over here tonight, looking for work, and come into the barn while you were there?"

It was Prescott who answered, shaking his head. "Not a chance, Doc. The fuse for the lights had been removed by someone to get Jasper out to the barn. A passing bum wouldn't have known he'd come out himself to fix something like that. And a bum would have no motive for killing him. Besides, I tell you we would have known it if someone sneaked up on us."

"Then how do you think he was killed?"

"I'm stumped," Prescott admitted. "I just don't know."

I turned back to Hanson. "Roy?"

"He sure didn't kill himself, that's all I know."

Sheriff Lens had been reading up on big-city police methods, and one of his deputies was taking a flash photograph of the body in the barn. I went back into the kitchen, where Belinda was attempting to comfort Sarah.

"Have they found anything yet?" Sarah asked me.

"Not yet. The deputies are searching the barn."

"It happened because of me, didn't it? Because of those letters?"

"I doubt that."

She dried her eyes and tried to compose herself while Belinda made a pretense of straightening the kitchen. "You try to do what's best," Sarah murmured, talking more to herself than to me. "You marry and raise a family. You watch your son grow into manhood, watch him start to go out with girls—"

"What are you trying to say, Sarah? Are you talking about Jasper or Matthew?"

"I don't know. Both of them." She started crying again and Belinda came to comfort her.

I climbed the stairs to the second floor and knocked softly on the closed door of Matthew's room. "Go away!" he said.

I opened the door and stepped inside. "I want to talk to you," I told him. "About your father."

"He's dead. I killed him."

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I sat down next to him on the bed and gripped his shoulders. He looked at me.

"I wrote some letters to Mom, about her and Roy Hanson. That's why Dad was killed."

"You wrote—" I'd already suspected it, of course. The English was too good to have come from Belinda or most of the others. But his admission was still a shock.

"Why did you do it, Matthew? Why would you put your mother through that torment?"

"She paid more attention to Roy than to me. I stayed in my room at night while he was down there in the living room with her."

"I thought you and Roy were friends. You said he played Monopoly with you."

"Just for something to do while his hand was healing. He didn't really care about me."

"*Did* you see him in the curing barn with your mother?"

He looked away. "No." His voice was low. "I made that up. I just wanted to hurt her. I thought maybe she'd stay away from him and pay more attention to me."

"We're going to have to tell her what you did, Matthew. It was very bad, but it had nothing to do with your father's death. You can't go on blaming yourself for that."

I stayed with him a while longer and he talked about his father and his mother, and about his dream of moving to the city. Finally I left him and went back downstairs. Sheriff Lens was standing in the barnyard, looking dejected.

"We searched every inch of the barn floor, Doc. There's no knife or anything else that coulda been used to cut his throat."

I had an idea.

"Have you searched Jennings' pockets?"

"Huh? I didn't think of that."

"If Prescott or Roy Hanson did kill him, they might have slipped the knife in his pocket to get rid of it."

It was a good idea, but there was nothing in Jennings' pockets but a handkerchief and a plug of chewing tobacco. Sheriff Lens stood up after searching him, shook his head, and ordered the body removed to the hospital for an autopsy. "Looks like we struck out on this one, Doc."

"Give me some time," I told him.

Some of the other workers were standing in the shadows watching

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the activity. Maybe they were worried about their jobs now that Jennings was dead. That must have occurred to Sarah, too, because she sent Frank Prescott out to speak with them.

"Mrs. Jennings says you're not to worry about your jobs. Work will go on tomorrow as scheduled. She's going to keep the farm running."

It was too gloomy an occasion for any cheers, but his words seemed to ignite a spark in the men. There were murmurs of agreement as they headed back to the bunkhouse.

Sheriff Lens stood watching Prescott. "Think the two of 'em are in it together, Doc?"

"No. I don't think they were that friendly."

"What do I do now?"

"Look for a left-handed person."

He looked at me. "There's no left-handed person among the possible suspects."

"Then it must be an impossible crime," I said with a grin.

"What's that smile for? You know something, Doc?"

"Just an idea. I'll check it out," I said. But suddenly I knew I was right.

I found Sarah alone in the parlor and sat across from her. "I found out who was writing those letters."

"That seems a long time ago now."

"It was Matthew. He admitted it to me."

"Why? Did he say why he'd do such a terrible thing?"

"He thought you were paying more attention to Roy than to him. Roy's only eleven years older than your son, you know."

"I know." Her face was drawn and pale. "But to torture me with such lies—"

I took a deep breath.

"They were lies to Matthew. But there was some truth in it, wasn't there? In striking out at you with those anonymous letters, your son touched a vulnerable spot. You and Roy Hanson are lovers, and when you showed the letters to Roy he panicked. He must have feared that Jasper had either written the letters himself or would find out about them."

"Stop it!" she shouted at me, leaping to her feet. "Don't say anything more. You're going to accuse Roy of killing my husband and it's not true! I know it's not true!"

"I'm terribly sorry, Sarah. But Roy Hanson killed Jasper and I think you know it."

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Sarah Jennings did know it was true. Sheriff Lens took some convincing.

"If he cut Jasper's throat, what happened to the knife? Don't try telling me he used a piece of ice that melted away. The wound was too smooth for that. It had to have been made by something very sharp."

"It was, Sheriff. I'd guess it was made by a razor blade."

"What happened to it?"

"Give me your flashlight and maybe I'll show you."

I took the flashlight and led the way back inside the curing barn to the spot where Jasper Jennings had been struck down. Shining the light straight up, I directed the beam around the highest parts of the roof, above the hanging lights that illuminated the place. "There. Do you see it?"

"I see something. Looks like—hell, it looks like a blue balloon!"

"Exactly—and it's tied to a blade from a safety razor. Hanson took the balloon from Matthew's room. He was up there playing Monopoly with the boy earlier. He tied it to the razor blade and slipped it under the loose jacket he was wearing. He knew Jennings would go out to replace the fuse himself, and he got Prescott to go along, too. In the darkness he reached over Jasper's shoulder and slit his throat with one stroke, getting his hand out of the way before blood started to flow. Then he simply released his grip on the razor blade and the balloon carried it up to the roof of the barn. It was well out of sight there, and even if we'd looked up it isn't likely we'd have spotted that blue color. He probably planned to retrieve it tomorrow before it was noticed in the daylight. If he couldn't reach it on a ladder he could puncture it with a slingshot or a BB gun."

"It could have been Prescott that done it," the sheriff argued.

I shook my head.

"Hanson had the motive, which I'll tell you about later. And Hanson had access to the balloons in Matthew's room. Most of all, Roy Hanson is left-handed."

"Hell, Doc, we been all through that! He's right-handed—he proved it."

"A small number of people are ambidextrous and can use both hands equally well. Hanson's one of them. I have the best evidence in the world for that, because earlier this summer I treated him for a hand injury. He was trimming the tops off tobacco plants with an axe when he accidentally hit the hand holding the plant. He hit his

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right hand, Sheriff, which means he was swinging the axe with his left hand—the same hand he used to cut Jennings' throat."

"Hanson was a tragic young man," Dr. Sam concluded, taking a sip of sherry. "He ran away that night when Sheriff Lens tried to arrest him. They found him in the morning over by the railroad tracks. He'd tried to hop a freight train in the dark and fell under the wheels. It took Sarah a long time to recover from the double tragedy of that night.

"Next time you come by the house, I'll tell you about my winter vacation in Maine, and about some strange tracks in the snow."

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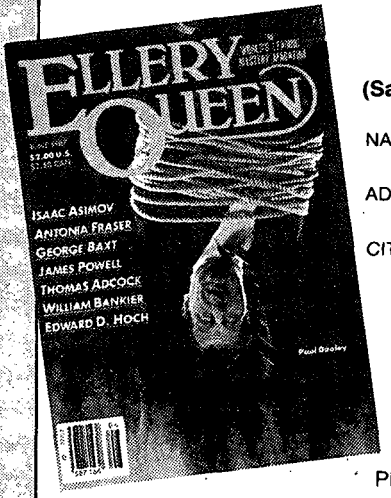

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a *NEW* short story by

ANTONIA FRASER

"No," the detective in charge of the case said, "not a woman's crime, not an assault like this. A man, and a young one, if you want my opinion."

"I'm glad I'm in the clear, at least, Inspector," Mrs. Langhorn said modestly. "On two counts, what is more. Age and sex . . ."

DEAD LEAVES

by ANTONIA FRASER

The first thing I noticed was the leaves. Or rather the lack of them. The deep ocean of dry brown leaves which had settled over the Jarvis forecourt in October and had remained there untouched for so many weeks—it was now late November—had suddenly been removed. Normally I would have been delighted: I hate disorder and the sight of this dead ocean offended me. But things weren't normal. That meant, had to mean, that Galina Jarvis was back. And so my heart sank when I thought of Marcus. It would be the first thing Galina did, the very first thing she did, to sweep the leaves away from the forecourt—advertising to the world, and to Marcus, that she was back.

Later the police told me that it was also the last thing she did.

Behind the huge pile of leaves in the far corner of the forecourt, next to a pile of black-plastic sacks in which she clearly intended to encase the dead leaves, Galina's body was found. The postman noticed her red hat the next morning and went to investigate. She still wore the cherry-red-woollen hat, that familiar hat she must have donned to keep her warm during the leaf-sweeping. The key to the house was in her pocket. She was still clutching the broom in her cold hand. Galina Jarvis, beautiful in life, but perhaps not

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so beautiful in death, had been brutally beaten with her own spade many times.

The detective in charge of the case told me that the first blow would have been enough.

"Enough for the deceased, that is, poor lady. Not enough for him. The murderer, I mean. He really went to town on this one."

"A man, then?" I inquired delicately.

"A man—and a strong one at that. If you can show me a woman with that kind of strength, even these days, whatever they say—"

It was not clear exactly who *they* were, but I got the impression that the detective was making some confused protest against the growth of women's liberation. As I agreed with him (why advertise ourselves when we've been managing things perfectly well for centuries?), I did not pursue the point. As a matter of fact, the late Galina Jarvis would have agreed with him, too, her approach to men and life having been distinctly old-fashioned.

"No, not a woman's crime, not an assault like this. A man, and a young one, if you want my opinion."

"I'm glad I'm in the clear, at least, Inspector," I said modestly. "On two counts, what is more. Age and sex."

Inspector Portsmouth smiled and patted my knee—a gesture to which I suppose he thought I was entitled by my advancing years.

"Oh, Mrs. Langhorn, it would never do for us to go about suspecting sweet little old ladies like you. Besides, you're just the sort of person who solves the problem in the murder stories my wife reads. Says they take her mind off my work, whatever that means."

I smiled in my turn—graciously, I like to think.

"Don't forget, Inspector, I'm a witness as well. About the leaves and the timing, I mean. I can be quite exact about that. I passed down the side of the square at one o'clock because the Sub Post-Office closes for lunch at one-fifteen. Such nice people there now! The Singhs. We have experiences in Kenya in common. Now don't smile: it does form a bond, even if mine were safaris in the Thirties with my late husband, and hers were—well, rather different. I certainly appreciate their arrival in our little neighborhood. To return to the leaves: to my great surprise, there was Galina Jarvis sweeping up her leaves. And I said as much to Mrs. Singh behind the counter. 'Mrs. Jarvis is back,' I observed. It has to be before one-fifteen when they close.

"After that I went shopping, went to the hairdresser—I still like

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to keep myself nice. I was back at four-thirty: I know the time because I popped into the Singhs' shop for a *Standard* on my way."

"We certainly know the leaves were thick in the morning," commented the Inspector. "Both neighbors—the houses on either side, Numbers 34 and 38—swear the leaves were untouched when they went to work in the morning. 'Desolate-looking,' Cavett, the City man at Number 34, called it. 'Had been for at least a month.' He was surprised no one had tried to burgle the house, he said—such an advertisement for its being empty. His own house is actually for sale but he's still right there on the site—the result is that everyone thinks the Jarvis house is the one for sale because of the leaves."

"No crime while she was away," I commented thoughtfully, "and then a major crime the moment she came back. No matter that she lost her life as a result of it: that's no excuse. Inspector, I must tell you plainly that Galina Jarvis was a troublemaker all her life, and this is the final proof." I think the Inspector looked rather startled at this point of view: he certainly didn't pat my knee again after what I said.

I should tell you about the leaves. All our houses in Notting Square have these wide paved areas in front of them. Forecourts, we call them, although that does sound rather like a garage, doesn't it, something most inappropriate to Notting Square, designed as it is in the Regency period and still elegantly looking it? The forecourts are not gardens, at any rate, but an area behind the high railings which sets each house back from the road. We have our gardens, of course—beautiful gardens, too—but they lie behind the houses, tucked well out of sight.

Some of us put a couple of bay trees in the forecourt, and there is one bed of floribunda roses—not quite appropriate, I sometimes think. I myself have one very large magnolia, which I planted when my grandson Marcus was born nearly thirty years ago. Nothing really softens the fact that these are rather dreary, dark forecourts intended to distance the busy world yet another fifteen yards from the discreet, silent houses of Notting Square, with its huge leafy trees above us and protecting us all.

Then in the autumn the leaves come. For weeks, they torrent down on top of us relentlessly—floating, hurtling, scudding, according to the weather. Fast or slow, they keep on coming down. There's no avoiding them. The Council, in the shape of some reluctant men in blue overalls, sweep the leaves off the streets into the black-

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plastic bags and, after a week or two—too long, in my opinion—away. But we're responsible for our own forecourts.

To tell the truth, I rather like sweeping up the leaves. It's not a hard job. I have my own little broom based on my own pint size (to which Inspector Portsmouth alluded with such heavy-handed gallantry), and the fact that you have to do the sweeping all over again the next day and the next and the next after that gives the job a certain timeless quality. Marcus, my grandson, who lives in the basement flat of my house, is supposed to do things like sweeping the leaves for me. As he's supposed to do other heavy jobs that I can't manage. But as a matter of fact, I sometimes wryly reflect, it's nearly always exactly the other way round. The truth is, I *like* bringing order into chaos, and you can't exactly say that about Marcus. There'll be plenty of time for him to change his ways, plenty of time before I'm really frail. Besides, it has to be admitted that when you sweep a forecourt you see what's going on in the world, don't you?

For example, it was while at my sweeping a year ago last October—rather early in the morning, but then I do like to get going early—that I realized my grandson Marcus was spending his nights with Galina Jarvis—those nights, that is, she was not spending with her rich Spanish admirer, the one who visits her in the Mercedes, sometimes with the chauffeur, sometimes without. And it was during my sweeping this year in late September—a quick foray as you might say to catch the early ones, the forerunners before the main army drops from the sky—that I established how and with whom Galina Jarvis departed for her holiday.

She went, of course, with the Spaniard. To be frank, who else could afford to keep Galina in the luxury she demanded? Of her current admirers, that is. Not Marcus, certainly—for Marcus, I fear, belongs to another army, the kind of army which doesn't so much drop from the sky as lie around in the streets. Or in Marcus's case, on my sofa—the army of the unemployed. No wonder Marcus gets depressed sometimes. I urge him—generally—to go down to the gym and work it off. To the gym, not the pub.

Nor could Charlie Jarvis, Galina's unfortunate husband, afford to take her on holiday. Galina had already ruined *him,* I fear, with her gaily insouciant extravagance. Poor Charlie Jarvis, no wonder he hates her—hated her, I should say—for in his case, Galina ruined him but somehow kept the house, the splendid freehold house in Notting Square. Charlie Jarvis was born in that house and he always

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loved it, even as a rambunctious little boy. And now it seems our freeholds are worth a fortune these days, or so they tell me—irrelevant information in my case, for I was born in Notting Square, too, you know, and with any luck will die in it. Except I don't want to die alone, of course, so "with any luck" means that I hope Marcus will still be here to "look after" me.

"Oh, Mrs. Langhorn, you're not to go talking about dying like that," says Mrs. Singh to me when I observed something along these lines to her. "I am sure Marcus is not thinking like that, too," she added in her kindly way. "He is loving his old grannie." For Mrs. Singh, of course, knows all about Marcus. She probably knows all about Marcus and Galina Jarvis, too—knew about them, I should say. Mrs. Singh certainly knows that I'm depending on Marcus to take care of me—when the time comes and I can no longer manage to take care of him.

I never told Marcus what I saw that September morning. First of all, Galina with her expensive suitcases, brand names stamped all over them (now *that* is vulgar—or would have been in my day). Then the Spaniard—acting discreetly in his terms, maybe, as he stole out of the house. He did look to left and right, and the collar of his camel-hair coat was turned up. All the same, he couldn't resist a quick kiss on her soft cheek, her soft plump cheek, as they stole out of the house together. (How *did* she look when she was dead? But I don't think I can ask the police, not under the circumstances.)

Of course, I didn't tell Marcus what I saw—just as I didn't tell Marcus she had returned. I think Inspector Portsmouth believed me. He certainly asked me about it enough times: Marcus's relationship with Galina, Marcus's feelings for Galina, even the breakup of Marcus's relationship with Galina.

Ah, well—as I told Inspector Portsmouth, that's past history.

"Mrs. Langhorn," said the Inspector patiently, "you do realize that your evidence of the timing is crucial? We've been over this before." We had indeed, many times. "I need not remind a lady of your—" what word was he going to use? "—a lady of your seniority—" he continued with a smile "—of the importance of precision in a case like this."

No, he certainly didn't need to remind me of its importance—I was quite as well aware as Inspector Portsmouth that Marcus had an unimpeachable alibi for the lunchtime period. That is to say, he'd been in the pub—our local, as a matter of fact, where he's rather well known. He arrived at twelve-thirty, plenty of witnesses to that,

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and left at closing time, about three, having eaten a pub lunch and drunk quite a few drinks. Then he went to the cinema up at Notting Hill Gate, plenty of witnesses to that because he goes quite often in the afternoon. It was almost empty, and as a result the usherette swears he didn't leave till five o'clock—in the Inspector's words, "No crafty slipping out to the Gents." He sat the opposite side of the cinema and never moved from his seat. And five o'clock—the time of his return—is too late for the time of death.

"So, Mrs. Langhorn, if you saw Galina Jarvis sweeping the leaves away at one o'clock—"

"I did, Inspector," I said firmly. "I'm quite clear about that. Just as I mentioned the fact to Mrs. Singh and she's quite clear about it, too."

"The money, Mrs: Langhorn," the Inspector went on rather more abruptly. He was beginning to drop the gallantry, I noted, and no longer treated me as a little old lady. More as an adversary. "You gave your grandson some money to go to the pub. And some money to go to the cinema. Wasn't that rather an odd thing to do when you've told several people around here you don't approve of Marcus going to the pub?"

"Odd?" I frowned in what I hoped looked like genuine puzzlement. "The poor boy has no money—"

"Yes, perhaps it wasn't so odd. Is it possible, Mrs. Langhorn, you were determined your grandson should be out of the way for a particular period, say twelve-thirty to four, and that was one way of making sure? But, of course, if Galina Jarvis, *seen only by you,* was not alive at one o'clock, was already dead before twelve-thirty—"

"Seen only by me, Inspector? Oh, whatever gave you that idea? Oh, no, no, no. Mrs. Singh saw Mrs. Jarvis. Didn't she tell you? You know what they're like about the police, don't quite trust them sometimes, I fear. She'll tell you now, I'm sure. When I told her Mrs. Jarvis was back, she was reminded that Mrs. Jarvis hadn't paid her bill, rather a big one—cigarettes, magazines, papers, going back months, back to the time she tricked Charlie Jarvis out of the house. 'Mrs. Singh,' I said, 'you'll catch her now if you run up the hill.' And, sure enough, she did the moment she closed for lunch. So *she* saw Mrs. Jarvis. I'm afraid she didn't get a check, though. 'Not a convenient time, Mrs. S,' said Galina in her languid way, with the broom in her hand. Poor Mrs. Singh could hardly insist. They're so polite. And now—" I maintained discreet silence. Frankly, I thought it unlikely that any of the three local men connected with the late

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Galina Jarvis would pay for her—not the Spaniard, not Marcus, and not Charlie Jarvis, even though Charlie had now of course regained possession of his beloved house, Galina having made no will while the divorce settlement was in the process of being thrashed out.

So it will be Charlie Jarvis sweeping up the dead leaves at Number 36 next year—in theory, at least. Of course, he may be engaged in some rather different form of menial work, or exercising in a rather different form of courtyard. How long will it take the police to reach Charlie Jarvis, I wonder? I don't feel inclined to help them any further, I'm afraid, especially in view of Inspector Portsmouth's quite unpleasantly abrupt manner. Besides, I have sometimes been accused of being a managing person, so all things considered I think I'll keep out of the affairs of the late Galina Jarvis in future. Let Inspector Portsmouth reach the obvious conclusion concerning Charlie Jarvis himself, now he's got rid of this silly obsession about my grandson Marcus and all those threats he was heard making about Galina and the Spaniard—"When she comes back, I'll fix her," that sort of thing, spread about the pub, I believe. So stupid and reckless. No wonder I had to do something about it all when I saw from the leaves that Galina was back. Because I need Marcus, you see. I need him to look after me in the future, here at the end of my life in Notting Square.

As for Charlie Jarvis, I doubt whether he will think it wise to tell the police about that telephone call. He'll be in too much trouble trying to explain away what happened when he got there. I think it was the sight of the For Sale sign on the railings of his house that actually did it. Just a quick telephone call to Charlie Jarvis and a word in his ear that Galina had come back with her Spanish friend and did he know that she had just put the house up for sale. That was my only part in it all—such a very minor one I simply don't think the Inspector need be bothered with it. By the time they'd had a flaming row, it was too late for Charlie to realize it was actually the house next door that was for sale.

How many blows? He was always such a violent little boy—a terror at Marcus's parties, I remember. But I mustn't think about that too much.

"Now you will be taking great care of yourself, Mrs. Langhorn," said Mrs. Singh this morning. "Marcus, too. He must take care of his grannie."

"He will, Mrs. Singh, he will," I replied. "After all, I've taken great care of him."

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a ***NEW*** short story by

TODD GRIMSON

We usually avoid publishing stories about drugs—they tend to be controversial and too dark for the entertainment value we strive for—but fiction does cross our desk that deals vividly with the problem and refuses to be ignored. These next two stories, both about the ubiquitous problem of controlled substances, are by novelists new to our pages. Todd Grimson's first novel, Within Normal Limits, *was published by Vintage Contemporary in May.*

Back in Seattle, Tony isn't answering his phone and Keith is beginning to get mad. All he can think is that for some reason Tony suspects the Drug Enforcement Administration of tapping his line . . .

THE STICKING PLACE

by TODD GRIMSON

Tony comes over at about 5:00. He told me the other day he wanted me to go with him to see someone: he didn't say what it was about. Tony smiles at me, wearing a brown-suede jacket, wine-red tie, white shirt, grey slacks, and black shoes. He's a little bit on edge. This is business.

"You haven't eaten yet, have you?" he asks. "Good, I haven't either. Listen, we'll do this and then we'll have dinner, is that all right with you? I'll buy us something good. And, here—this is for coming along with me. I really appreciate it, Keith—you don't know how paranoid I get these days."

I put the money in my wallet. Tony thinks I'm tough because I once knocked down a drunk. Tony, quite short himself, is also impressed by my height. I'm 6'3". I played football in college, before

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wrecking my knees. And so, I guess, I at least remember what it's like to think you're tough. I have that.

Tony is thirty-six, seven years older than me. He used to be a salesman—now he owns a popular bar. Since his analysis a few years back, he's made an effort to avoid glad-handing and Dale Carnegie techniques—unless he needs to for business, in which case he has a full repertoire. The trouble in the past was he couldn't turn it off.

Most of the time, even though he jokes, he wants to be taken seriously. He likes me, partly I'm sure just because I took him seriously, or appeared to, at a time when he maybe didn't deserve it, when others thought he was crazy, a manic fool. Back when he was selling ladies' underwear and running around.

In the Datsun pickup—a vehicle I've never before seen him drive—I ask him what this is all about.

"I told you," he says, not smiling now, sincere. "A guy owes me some money. He knows he's supposed to pay me, so there shouldn't be any problem."

"Where are we going?"

"Burien," says Tony, naming a suburb just to the south of Seattle, beyond the big Boeing plant. "Guy's a dentist."

It's rush hour and traffic is slow. Tony turns on the radio and we listen to some music and then the news. I'm thinking that a dentist doesn't strike me as too frightening.

Tony lights up a cigarette and tells me about how he went to an acupuncturist to see if the treatment could help him quit.

"He put these needles in my ears," he says. "Four needles, Keith, in each ear."

"Did it hurt?" I ask, curious, wondering if it could not.

"Yeah, it hurt," he says emphatically. "Then he put this staple down here, on my earlobe." Tony holds onto his right ear, pulling on it, then lets go and shakes his head. "He left me alone for half an hour and I just sat there with these eight needles in my ears. But the funny thing was after a while the pain started to get interesting. It was kind of soothing."

I laugh.

"I've never been able to understand how these people could be into pain," he says. "I always just thought they were messed up. Pain is *pain,* you know? Well, now I think there might be something there. It could get interesting. I don't know."

I just look at him as though to say, "Oh, yeah, sure, right." Tony

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laughs, and honks at someone trying to cut into our lane. We're getting closer to the turn-off. Tony reaches over, unlocks the glove compartment in front of me, and pulls out a gun.

"Here, hold this." He speeds up a little.

I look at him, serious this time.

"Don't worry, brother, it doesn't mean anything," Tony says. "I keep it to protect myself. Why don't you carry it in your jacket? It's loaded, so don't mess around with it."

"What kind of gun is this?" I ask, feeling funny about this development, not sure what it portends. I mean, I get it that Tony wants me to be his thug.

"Thirty-two caliber, with a two-inch barrel. Just the right size, I think."

"Why do we need it? I thought you said the guy's a dentist. What, his dog's gonna bite us on the leg? His wife's really big?"

"I'm just thinking, if he gives us any hassle, this'll save us from having to wrestle with him or something. Just take it out and show it to him, you know? If he's a jerk. I don't think you'll need to point it at him or anything."

I feel like Tony either thinks I'm dumb, or else just amoral, ready to go along with something dubious just for the kick. I'm concerned, but there doesn't seem to be much to say about it at this point. I have a certain amount of confidence in Tony, that he knows what he's doing, but it doesn't seem like he thinks I have any objections to doing some crime. I suppose I've done nothing to counter this impression—I talked too seriously one night about how I'd like to stick up a bank.

The address is in a cul-de-sac. The dentist's house is two-story and white, with blue shutters and a brick front porch. A double garage, with a boat parked on a trailer in the driveway, next to an Oldsmobile.

The other houses nearby are much the same.

We park in front and go to the front door. It's nearly 6:00. The dentist answers, looking irritated and, yes, a little worried. He's almost as tall as I am, but fleshier, balding, in his late thirties. Still very tan from the summer just past.

"Can we come in?" Tony asks, smiling, seemingly quite at his ease.

"All right," says the dentist after a hesitation, looking like he doesn't really dare turn Tony away. Within, we can hear a television, and to the left there's the smell of cooking and meat.

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The dentist leads us down the hall to the right, evidently away from the vicinity of his family, into a maple study. He closes the door behind us.

"I don't want you calling me any more," he says to Tony. "Not at my office, and not here, bothering my wife."

"Phil, I don't like to have to make phone calls," Tony says. "And I don't like coming here to your house. It's ridiculous. You know, everything's fine, and you ask me to trust you, and I do—and then you keep putting me off. We had an arrangement in good faith."

I'm looking around, terribly aware of Phil's attitude, which I'm afraid irks me just a bit. What's this guy's problem? The gun feels heavy in my pocket, and I'm embarrassed, deeply embarrassed somehow..

"All right," says Phil, acting as though he's being put upon. "Here you go," he says as he unlocks the bottom drawer of his desk, reaching behind some folders to pull out an unwrinkled brown-paper bag.

Tony accepts it and empties the contents onto the top of the desk. He counts the money, then puts it back into the sack.

"It's short," he says. "It's not all here."

"That's all I could put together. It's how much you fronted me, you know, plus some more—you're getting a good return." The dentist sounds like he thinks he's talking to a patient in his office, as though he has some authority we have to defer to.

"You kept me waiting," Tony says. "You put me off. The other day on the phone you said you'd have it all, interest included. We made an agreement—moron."

"You called me at my office," says the dentist. "I just wanted to get you off the phone. This is plenty. Take it and get out of here."

I'm getting sick. But this is my cue. I feel as though the dentist has deliberately insulted and inconvenienced me by making things unpleasant and hard. "Let's see what's in your wallet," I say. "Come on—let's see."

"Get out of here," says the dentist, staring back at me, his face flushed very red, evidently despising and hating me worse than he does Tony—or just getting madder all the time.

I show him the .32. It feels like we're in a film—there's a prescribed etiquette I know how to obey.

"You think this isn't real?" I ask him, feeling that I'm being very menacing and self-assured. It's crazy what a feeling of power having a gun gives you. I'm dangerous right now, dangerous as hell.

Phil suddenly looks alarmed. Frozen-faced, he extracts his wallet

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from his back pocket, holding it out so that Tony can take it and relieve it of a thick wad of many bills.

"It shouldn't have to be this way," Tony says. "Phil, you think about all of this later when you've cooled down. I could have had your elbows broken two weeks ago—you'd never feed yourself again. I've really bent over backwards. All I can think is that you're just stupid. You try to keep dealing to your friends: you're not going to find anyone for your supply that'll be as civilized as me. And you and I can't do business any more."

I have the gun back in my pocket, my hand on it, thinking how strange this is, to be violent without touching or being touched. We make Phil go out of the study and down the hall in front of us. He comes outside and stands in the driveway, watching as we leave. He looks shaken and subdued.

As we head back into town, Tony says, "You were perfect. Isn't it funny, he didn't think we were serious until he saw the gun? I had a feeling. Here I was, giving him a break. How do you feel, brother? You were great."

"Oh, fine, I guess, considering I just about shot the guy. What if he'd tried to grab me, or made a sudden move? I'd be a killer, just like that."

We're silent for a while, and then Tony says, reflectively, "I'm sorry, Keith. Really. I wasn't thinking about all the bad possibilities. I probably should've turned the debt over to some people I know, just sold him to them. Sharks. They would have torn him apart. Listen, I want you to have the difference. You deserve it. I wouldn't have got it if not for you."

I need money, as Tony knows, and so I take it. I still feel like I'm under the influence of some drug, a big dose of adrenaline changing my chemistry—needing to wear off. I could have killed him and I don't know how I feel about it.

The gun goes back in the glove compartment. We go into Chen's and have a drink and order something to eat.

I start to feel better, even slightly euphoric. The alcohol and money cheer me up.

"I think I'm in love," says Tony, back to himself again. "I met this woman the other night. Angela. She wants to dance, but Sunny—you know who Sunny is?—Sunny says she's not big enough. So Angela's tending bar, waiting to have implants. I really like her. She's smart. Reads books, listens to classical music. I asked her why she wants

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to be a topless dancer. You know what she said? That it's her fantasy. Her shrink told her that if it was her fantasy maybe she ought to act it out, see what happens. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's a good idea. But I'm against implants."

Tony says they don't leave that much of a scar.

Then in a little while he says, "I guess I'm going to have to start paying to get my teeth cleaned—at least for a while."

"Tony, how long before you get busted? Won't that happen sooner or later, no matter how good you are?"

"I know what you're saying—and I appreciate it, I really do. The thing is, though—I need money. I'm doing all right, but with a little more time I can be doing really all right: I can put myself in a position where I can't slip back. The way things are, I could slip back anytime. I could end up selling underwear again. I don't want to do that, you know?"

I nod, and smile, seeing that it's hopeless, even though I understand. Tony and I are friends.

The next day I call Jay, thinking we might go out, but she's distant and detached. I don't get how she can still love me and be tired of me at the same time. If she believes the worst, and I admit it, somehow I feel that squares the books. I haven't been that much of a jerk. She should just relax and trust me a bit more.

To some extent, I'm a victim of my physique. When I was an adolescent, I was such a natural athlete—big and strong and fast, with quick reflexes—that it was too easy for me to accept the idea that my future would be as a jock. All the coaches, the scouts, praised me to the skies.

At Michigan State, watching the film of the last game with the coaches and the rest of the team, everyone waited to see my hits. I was murderous, and fearless. Everything that was wrong with my childhood and my life, all my doubts and self-hatred, all of it could be expressed, if not exorcized, in the pure animality of virtually killing someone on the field. People applauded me for this, they loved it. I was admired for my "aggressiveness."

I wasn't a total jerk, perhaps—maybe only eighty percent. The other twenty percent was baffled and afraid. Trying not to think.

Then in the last game of my sophomore year, I tore up my left knee. No one even hit me—I just jumped up in the air, trying to block a field goal, and landed all wrong. The pain, the operation,

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the rehabilitation process all just confirmed what I already secretly knew. I was weak. I was a flawed vessel.

My junior year, I wasn't as good. I didn't trust my knee. I didn't seem to be able to feel as much like a kamikaze any more. I was still good, but I was no longer great, no longer all over the field. Halfway through the season, my right knee got tangled up in a big pileup and that was it. Both knees. I was gone.

I thought it wouldn't be so bad not to be a jock, but on the other hand I had sort of counted on making a lot of money as a linebacker, tackling guys viciously on TV. Now I had to be a real person and I wasn't sure I was up to it.

I didn't even finish school. I started getting drunk all the time and felt the professors all thought I was dumb. Formerly, I hadn't cared what they thought—the joke was on them. Now it was on me.

I've had so many jobs since then. Some I've actually been good at, but my attitude toward management sooner or later becomes something I can't disguise. I can't stand petty tyranny, people with a little power who get off on making you feel like a slave. I've tried to play their game again and again, but I just can't keep it up. *They* have to adjust to *me*.

As one boss told me, it probably just comes down to the fact that I got used to being treated like a star. I think I'm important, that I'm special, and I'm not. I'm not.

A month after my trip to the dentist with Tony, in New Orleans, I follow my instructions and go to the Spotlight Cafe. I ask the old guy behind the counter if he's got any jumbo shrimp. He takes a long look at me, then says, "No, we don't got none of that here. You best go down the corner to Fred's Bayou Specials."

"Thank you," I say. "Appreciate it."

"Any time." The old guy must be seventy-some years old, bald, with a white apron, chef's hat, and white T-shirt soiled with food.

New Orleans is a long way from Seattle, and I'm nervous. I don't like carrying a suitcase of money around. Also, I've got Tony's .32 in my jacket pocket, and the combination makes me feel like a ticking bomb. There's too much local color down here. I can understand what the people are saying, but it takes a moment of translation sometimes and everyone seems to know I'm from the North.

I go to Fred's Bayou Specials and take a back booth. I tell the blonde waitress I want an order of jumbo shrimp, cole slaw, and some fries. And a Coke.

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The place isn't very busy. There are only two other parties in the small restaurant: a fleshy couple eating chicken and a big fat guy with two older peroxide beehive blondes. The fat guy has a platter of french fries in front of him he sprinkles with hot sauce every couple of bites.

I read the big menu on the wall, looking for catfish or something. Not to eat. My food arrives in a wax-paper and yellow-plastic basket and I start to eat. It's hot and crisp and good. I put some hot sauce on my fries, as seems to be the custom. These really are large pieces of shrimp.

When I come out into the street afterward, an attractive black woman in a blue dress approaches me and says hi. Nice smile. Short hair. Very dark skin. A gap between her front teeth.

"You like your jumbo shrimp?" she asks and I realize she is the contact.

"Just like my Aunt Flossie used to make," I say, smiling, as we fall into step.

"All right, now I gotta ask you to show me something," she says. "Where can we do it you think?"

She's amused at me, because I'm supposed to show her the barbed-wire scar on my left thigh I got when I was thirteen years old. To do this I'll have to take down my pants. She's presuming I have some white-boy shyness, and she's right. It's kind of hard to see where we can do this on the street.

"How about that alley up ahead?" I say. "We can check it out, anyway."

"Okay," she says. "How about in the meantime letting me see your driver's license?"

She acts out comparing my face with the one on the card, seemingly having fun, and then tests me to see if I can remember my birthday. In the alley, we go behind a dumpster piled high with cardboard boxes and I keep one foot on the suitcase as I quickly show her the mark.

"My, my," she says and touches the curved scar. "Who did that to you? Whew," she says and reaches further, just to see me jump. "You shy?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty shy," I say, unable to keep from smiling back at her even though she's being too unpredictable for me to feel at ease.

"You know Billie Holiday? That's who I am. Really, that's my name. You ready to meet Pat Garrett now? You seem cool enough

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to me. Let's go back and get your car. Silver Volvo, right? I been spying on you."

Of course, I think, I'm not from the Drug Enforcement Administration, so she's not making a mistake. She's checked me for the scar, too, which, since it's so old, would be difficult to fake.

Billie directs me to the Quarter, all the while asking me how I like New Orleans, have I been to this place or that, and what did I think of the states I passed through on my trip. I talk to her and like her more and more. She's tall and slender, with beautiful skin. I can smell her perfume inside the car. She acts as though she likes me, she's attracted to me, and I know this is professional charm. I assume she's a hooker or a dancer, something like that.

After the car is parked, we walk for a distance—perhaps to see if we're being followed. I don't think we are. At last we go into a courtyard and up into a very old, Spanish-looking building. On the third floor, we go down a hall and Billie knocks on the door of 305. The door is unlocked and she pushes it open, shows me in, smiling, and then closes the door behind me, not entering herself.

It is a fairly large apartment with polished hardwood floors, completely bare except for a leather telephone hooked up to an answering machine. There's no furniture at all, at least in this room.

A blond man with a moustache comes in from the kitchen, smiles, and says hello, holding out his hand for me to shake. I do.

He has a distinctive, Southern "character" voice and he's ugly enough to be good-looking. Maybe thirty-five years old.

"My name's Garrett. What do you think of Fred's Bayou? Food all right?"

"Oh, yeah. It was great."

"How's Tony these days? I haven't seen him for a while—I worry about the man."

"He's doing pretty good. He's doing a lot of business at the club."

"I'm glad to hear that. I remember when he was living down here, after he divorced that first wife of his, the bitch, he used to talk about having his own restaurant or jazz club. I'm glad to hear he's doing some business. He's my second cousin, you know. He tell you that? He used to be one crazy, wild little sucker. You like Billie?"

"She seems real nice. Friendly."

"Too friendly for her own good, you ask me. Well, should we get down to it? You look like you want to check things out—you got that look on your face."

I shrug and smile. Garrett goes to the closet and brings out a tan

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suitcase, which he opens up on the floor so I can see the double-cellophane packets of cocaine.

In my suitcase, on top of the money, I am equipped with a gram scale, some litmus paper, and a beaker in which to dissolve some of the substance for the purity test.

"I guess I better count the money," Garrett says, "since Tony put you up to all this." He's tanned, wearing a yellow shirt and faded jeans. His bearing gives an impression of laziness that covers alertness—as though he knows it doesn't fool anyone, but he'll act lazy all the same.

"You want to try some, feel free," says Garrett as I prepare to do my first spot test.

"I don't think so," I say. "I don't use it enough to know much with my nose. I'd just get high."

Garrett laughs. "I know what you mean. Sure a lot of people like it, though, don't they? I kind of follow the wisdom of Jack Daniels myself. That's what they say down in Jamaica: 'Only one wisdom at a time.' That's why they don't drink white rum at the same time they smoke the weed. What kind of weapon you carrying?"

I take it out of my pocket and show it to him. Garrett stops counting money—which he wasn't doing with much of a will, anyway—to examine the piece in his hands.

"You want to see mine, go check the refrigerator. Bring it in here, all right?"

"What size is this?" I ask, returning with a large revolver, noticing Smith and Wesson engraved on the blackish metal of the barrel.

"You new to weaponry, ain't you?" And when I admit I am, Garrett takes it upon himself to explain some of the finer points.

"What you got here now, your thirty-two, you can hide in your pocket, it's concealable, but it just don't have the kind of stopping power I think you'd like to have. Let me tell you, I've heard stories about guys shooting these and having the bullets bounce off a window. With a forty-five, though, or a .357 mag like you got there in your hand—my own personal choice of weapon—you hit someone with one of these, that sucker's gonna be *knocked down*. Hit him in the arm—he's going down. What I've got going here in my mag is thirty-eight-caliber, hollow-point bullets—most of your New Orleans cops like to use these hollow-point rounds."

"They spread out when they hit, don't they?"

"Yeah. Mess you up inside. They don't go on through and, uh, injure other citizens."

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Garrett is enjoying himself. Clearly, guns are one of his enthusiasms. It's fun to tell an interested innocent about a subject one knows well. I hear about smokeless powder, the difference between single- and double-action revolvers, and how automatics, it's true, do have a tendency to jam up on you.

We sit on the floor by our exchanged suitcases. The way to get the bullets into the chambers of a revolver quickly, nearly as quickly as with an automatic, in which you just snap in a clip, is to use a round plastic device called a speed loader, which holds six rounds and fits the cylinder so you can pop in all six at once.

It's like boys comparing toy soldiers or train sets—but something about being here in New Orleans with this genial but still somewhat frightening cocaine smuggler, engaged in this activity, my senses attuned to the flavor of the Southern air, combine to make me fascinated by this gun lore, which doesn't seem irrelevant to my concerns at all. I feel as though I'm being initiated into a long tradition of violent American males. What is surprising is the element of play.

When he realizes I've absorbed all the information that's going to be of any use to me for a while, Garrett shakes my hand again, saying, "It's been nice doing business with you. Tell Tony to give me a call. Maybe he can come down here for Mardi Gras. You come yourself if you want to see some sheer craziness. You can't buy a hotel room then, but I can always find someplace for my friends. Hey, I enjoyed meeting you—hope to see you down here again."

When I'm back outside, walking to the car, the whole transaction already seems a bit surreal—that empty apartment, with just the phone, and Billie Holiday. And yet I have the product, everything has gone as planned.

Before this, carrying the money was dangerous, shady, but not, strictly speaking, against the law. From now on, though, I'm completely outside the law. I'm a "trafficker," carrying a concealed weapon. That's a pretty heavy charge.

Using a phonebooth, depositing some silver, I dial long distance and leave a message on Tony's recorder. "Hallelujah," I say and hang up. Tony will now know everything has gone without a hitch.

The night in the Pontchartrain Arms seems to go by quickly, and in the morning I check out, heading back up I-55 toward Jackson, Mississippi, and points north.

Tony gave me some Dexamyls in case I need or feel I need to go a long time without sleep. Dexamyl comes with a tranquillizing agent in it, to keep you from getting too nervous on the speed. I

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reach St. Louis and just keep going, through Kansas City and Topeka, rolling through Kansas in the middle of the night.

I call Tony five times, and all I keep getting is the recording. Tony ought to be home sometime: he ought to answer his phone. I'm beginning to get mad—what's he doing? The only thing I can think of is that for some reason he suspects the DEA of tapping his line. If that's the case, then Tony's close to being busted, and I'm likely to go down as well.

I need to get back home and stash the cocaine and then go see Tony, tell him where it is, he can pick it up himself. Get paid and get straight. I don't want to help Tony do any more collections or anything else.

I drive and drive, staying pretty close to the speed limit, listening to the static on the radio, a talk show, some Rock.

Just at dawn, out in the middle of nowhere, I take the car off I-70 and travel a few miles away from the highway. There's nobody, nothing around for miles. A few trees up on a hillock. I take the .32 and some ammunition out into the chill, crisp air and spend some time shooting the hell out of one particular tree, my left hand cradling my right fist wrapped around the stock, keeping my elbow flexible and slightly bent.

Nothing happens to me because of this. Nobody hears—or cares. I drive back to the highway and continue on my way west. The sun catches up with me.

I still can't get Tony on the phone. Something is wrong. I remember New Orleans like a long-lost, pleasant vacation. I should have had some gumbo, gone out and heard some jazz. I wonder what Billie Holiday is doing. If she's smiling. I sort of assume she is.

Back in Seattle, I go to a hotel, check the suitcase in their checkroom, and then make some more calls. I'm tired and in a hurry, and still kind of mad. At Tony's club, I get Barry, the bartender, and he says nobody's seen Tony for days.

"He's done this before, though," Barry says. "Just run off for a vacation with some new babe. We can run ourselves, you know. Tony trusts us, and he should."

Barry knows me: he recognized my voice. I tell him if Tony shows up to tell him I called but if anyone else asks, not to mention my name.

"Yeah, sure," he says. "I understand." Bartenders always want you to think they understand.

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It's 9:00 at night. I keep thinking Tony's dead. I realize I don't know enough to make sensible decisions—I just don't know enough about Tony's other "friends." I know he got some money from some of these and that they're criminal types, but I don't know who they are.

Now that I'm in town, it seems like a bad place to be. I don't know what to do. I've got all this cocaine and yet I have hardly any money in my wallet, not even enough for much more gas.

I need to get my bankbook, and then clean out my account. Then I could aim for Portland or San Francisco and try to sell some of this coke. Maybe hang out in gay bars, try selling it to rich gays. I don't know. It's weird that Tony seems to have just disappeared. There must have been some kind of accident or mistake.

I drive by his house. The lights are on. This strikes me as a very bad sign. A little later, I call Jay from a phonebooth on Roosevelt Way.

"Would you do me a favor?" I ask, and she's suspicious, more suspicious than she ought to be.

"What is it?" she says.

"I need you to go to my apartment for me and pick up a couple of things."

"I don't understand," she says. "Why can't you go in your own apartment?"

"I'm not sure," I say, thinking of Tony getting interested in pain. "It might be nothing—I'm probably just imagining things, you know? I just need my bankbook, and maybe a couple of shirts."

"Keith, come on, what is this? What's going on?"

"Nothing, really." She doesn't believe me, so I say, "Okay: there's a guy who's sort of after me. We got into a fight in a bar and I decked him, and I guess he wants some revenge. And I'm scared."

"Maybe you are—but you're not scared of anyone who wants to get into a fight. You love it," she says, and there's a certain satisfaction in her voice—somehow, even if with some affection, at my expense.

"Will you do it?" I ask.

"No," she answers, "I don't trust you. I'm sorry, Keith, but I don't. You've been waiting to get involved in something dangerous—with that sleazeball Tony, I bet—and now maybe you're in it. And I'm sorry, I hope you come out of it all right, but it's not my life and I don't want any part of it."

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"Okay," I say with a big sigh. "I'm sorry. Really, Jay—I'm sorry. You're right."

"If you need a lawyer," she begins, and I know she's going to recommend her friend Sarah or one of Sarah's friends and I just hang up.

I drive around for a while and stop to get something to eat, but I'm too wound up to eat more than a couple of bites. I keep checking my watch and thinking about what time it is, and trying to figure out a scenario where Tony can still be alive. His big score, and he just walks away.

Right around midnight, I drive down the street by my apartment without stopping and look around. Nothing. My apartment—one unit in some court apartments—is dark.

Okay, I decide, I'll just do it really fast. In and out. I go around the block and come back, park and get out of my car.

On my porch, I get my mail out of the mailbox. Nothing from Tony—nothing of any interest at all.

Then someone speaks to me and I realize I have made a mistake.

Coming slowly up the stairs from the street, the guy says, "Hey, Keith. Hey, Keith, be cool, okay? I'm from Tony."

"Where is he?" I say, oddly calm. The worst is happening, I think, and so I'm just right there, I don't want to make any more obvious mistakes.

"He's lying low, that's all. He sent me here to meet you, pick up the product. It's in your car, right?"

"I don't know you," I say. "Let's call Tony. When I've talked with him, everything will be fine."

I sense, perhaps too keenly attuned, that there's someone in my apartment. I don't like this guy, and I don't think Tony's alive. It's a white guy, with an earring and a moustache and the air of having done some time.

"What's wrong with you, man?" he says, looking at me very closely, wary, and he reaches across his torso into his belt and I see he has a gun he's going to point at me very soon.

I fire the .32, missing him at first, as he fires at me and misses, too, startled by me—and then I hit him dead in the center of his chest and he's blown back down the steps to the dark sidewalk below.

My front window explodes, and in the midst of thunder something like a huge club hits me high in the back and knocks me off the

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porch. I'm on the grass, too stunned, but I manage to roll over and see the guy come out my front door.

"Terry!" he yells hoarsely, distraught.

I miss his stomach, maybe because I'm on the ground—I miss high, hitting him in the face. He goes back against the screen door, breaking glass with his elbow, but he shoots his gun and so I keep shooting, too. I hit him once or twice more and it's almost like it's the bullets that are holding him up—before he crumples, bones turning to water, nothing left of his life.

I lie there thinking I shouldn't move, uncertain even where I'm hit. I can move—I mean, I'm not paralyzed—but I don't think I can stand up or even crawl.

I hear police sirens, and an ambulance, and blue-shirted policemen enter my field of vision, carrying their guns. They look interested and concerned.

"Is there anyone else?" one, a black guy, asks me and I say, "Two?"

"Right. One here, one down on the street. They both look DOA."

Ambulance attendants work on me briskly, starting an IV and getting me into their rig. I cough a little and there's blood, yet I still seem able to breathe. The ambulance races in the night.

It was all so unbelievably loud, my ears will never stop ringing. The loudness was the most violent thing.

I got both of those guys. They're dead and I'm not. I don't think I'm going to die or I'd already be dead. Maybe that's wrong—it's probably pretty easy to just die.

At the hospital, they do more stuff to me, crowding around in masks, and they're so efficient and in a hurry, giving me blood out of a bag and so on, that I think maybe I've been too optimistic about my condition.

Jay was right about me. She knew me all too well. She'll know I'm pleased all this happened, pleased that I killed those guys before they could get me first. That's what's important, after all. I do feel pretty good. You have to have the courage of your mistakes. Whoever you are, you have to follow your nature, come what may, and do the best you can.

They wheel me into the operating room to see what can be done. I hear the surgeon ordering more blood. A nurse's hand is on my shoulder to keep me calm before they put me out.

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a ***NEW*** **short story by**

BARBARA PAUL

Barbara Paul's most recent mystery novels are But He Was Already Dead When I Got There *(Scribners) and* A Chorus of Detectives, *the third in her series of operatic mysteries (St. Martin's), and her* Kill Fee *and* The Renewable Virgin *have recently come out in paperback from Bantam. With a Ph.D. in Theater History and Criticism, she has taught in South Carolina, California, Ohio, and, finally, at the University of Pittsburgh. Now she writes full time, in both the science fiction and mystery genres. In a 1986 interview in* Mystery Reporter *she said, "I wrote a book once called* Liars and Tyrants and People Who Turn Blue. *I sent it to my agent and told him, 'This book is science fiction.' He wrote back and said, 'Yes—but just barely.' He sold the book as a mystery, and that year it made* The New York Times *notables list as one of the best mysteries of the year."*

On his way to the restaurant, Mr. Kouros passed a Federal Dispensing Center two doors away from his shop. There were only one or two "customers" inside. When the place had first opened, there had been lines all the way up the block . . .

DESPERATE REMEDIES

by BARBARA PAUL

Mr. Kouros couldn't open his shop Monday morning because a dead man was blocking the door. Middle-aged, stick-thin, probably hadn't eaten for days. But that wasn't what killed him. Mr. Kouros bent over until he could see the metal implant in the man's hand. He hurried down to the public phone on the corner and

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punched the special number that every "clean" resident of the city had memorized months ago.

"Disposal," an androgynous voice answered.

"O.D. needs picking up," Mr. Kouros said. "Fourteen-ten Detweiler Street."

The voice repeated the address. "Right, thanks for calling."

Mr. Kouros walked back to his shop and waited, keeping his eyes averted from the pitiful figure in the shop doorway. You'd think I'd be used to it by now, he thought dully.

Within five minutes, the high bleating of the mobile disposal unit reached his ears. In larger places like New York or Los Angeles he'd have had to wait as long as an hour. The blue-and-silver van pulled up to the curb. Mr. Kouros watched impersonally as two muscular young men and an older one piled out of the back and proceeded to zip up the corpse in a body bag. They moved quickly and efficiently, no wasted motion. "Will they do an autopsy?" Mr. Kouros asked.

The older man laughed shortly. "What for?" He shook his head at Mr. Kouros, and then they were gone.

Neat. No fuss. No questions.

Mr. Kouros unlocked the door and went into his shop. Shelves filled with gourmet foods gleamed in the artificial light, as did tables displaying shamefully overpriced designer kitchen utensils. Racks of lovingly chosen wines lined one wall, samples from the larger stock in the temperature-controlled basement. Mr. Kouros glanced at his watch: ten-fifteen. The dead man had made him fifteen minutes late opening up. And his assistant was late this morning. Again.

Speak of. "Morning, Mr. Kouros," a cheery young voice called out. "Bus was late."

Mr. Kouros grunted and went back to his office to start the coffee. Colombian Supremo today. Roger, his assistant, began checking the cheese display case to see what needed to be replaced. A woman came in and bought two smoked pheasants.

By the time she was gone, the coffee was ready. Mr. Kouros carefully cut two slices of pineapple-and-macadamia-nut cake. Roger came into the office, took his customary chair in the corner, and sipped at the coffee. "Sumatra Mandheling?"

"Good heavens, no—Colombian Supremo." It was a game they played. Every day Mr. Kouros would use a different kind of coffee, and every day Roger would try to identify it. He was right about half the time.

Mr. Kouros had almost finished his cup before he noticed Roger's

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right hand. Something new was there, a round metal implant of the sort he'd already seen once that morning. "Roger?" He couldn't believe it. "You're a doper?"

Roger waved the hand with the implant airily. "Don't worry, Mr. K, I can handle it."

Dear God. "You can *handle* it. Roger, this morning I found an O.D. curled up against the door here. That man must have thought *he* could 'handle' it."

Roger was momentarily taken aback. "This morning?"

"This morning. Is that the way you want to end up—zipped into a plastic bag and hauled off to a morgue like a piece of meat? You die with that thing in your hand and you're just a statistic. Even if you die by other causes, nobody will investigate, nobody will do an autopsy."

The young man cleared his throat nervously. "I hear they're going back to doing autopsies. Most of the hard cases have already overdosed—the police are going to have time to investigate again."

"That should be a great comfort to you," Mr. Kouros remarked drily.

"It's only recreational drugs with me. I'm not an addict—it's just once in a while."

Silently Mr. Kouros pointed to Roger's right hand.

"Because it's the only way you can get the stuff now." Roger laughed. "You can't buy it on the streets any more—not since the government started handing it out free. Besides, why should I pay when everybody else is getting it for nothing?"

"You're killing yourself."

"No, I'm not, Mr. Kouros, honestly. All I do is smoke a little pot. I don't do the hard stuff more than two or three times a year. It's nothing to worry about." They both heard the shop door open, and Roger jumped up in relief. "I'll get it."

Mr. Kouros stood in the office doorway and watched his assistant. Roger had registered with one of the Federal Dispensing Centers and had been implanted with the required identification disc—but he showed no signs of being addicted. Yet. His walk was steady and his voice clear and cheerful as he spoke to the customer.

The customer was a young woman who looked as if she couldn't really afford the thirty-two dollars she plunked down for the French chocolate cheesecake she'd asked for. Important dinner tonight, then—trying to impress someone. Her boss? A boy friend? Her husband? Her husband's boss? His parents? Something of a purist, Mr.

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Kouros didn't approve of chocolate cheesecake. But he sold it anyway.

Then without warning the shop was busy. A business executive wanting four bottles of Château Petrus. A middle-aged couple indulging themselves at the cheese counter. A college student who took ten minutes deciding between two moderately priced burgundies. An old man who came in every Monday morning to buy Australian apricots. Two youngsters looking for something that would make a nice gift. Repeat customers, newcomers—a wave of them, all at once. The mail carrier came.

When the rush was over, Mr. Kouros went back to his office to look through the morning's mail. He skimmed through the catalogues from several of his suppliers before opening the letters and bills, nibbling from a plate of cheese and olives as he read. He looked at his watch: eleven-thirty. An hour and a half before he met the others.

A little over an hour later, he told Roger he wouldn't be back directly after lunch—he had a doctor's appointment. Roger politely expressed the hope that nothing was wrong. No, said Mr. Kouros, just his annual checkup. He had to account for his absence that afternoon some way.

But lunch first. Seven blocks to the restaurant—plenty of time. He passed a Federal Dispensing Center two doors away from his shop, only one or two "customers" inside. When the place had first opened, there'd been lines all the way up the block. Perhaps they could shut down before long.

The fall weather was just beginning to turn nippy, exactly the way Mr. Kouros liked it. Up to a year ago he'd have had to fight lunchtime crowds all the way to Mrs. DeMarco's restaurant, but not now. Overpopulation had stopped being a pressing problem.

Mr. Kouros hurried his step, beginning to feel a little anxious. His route took him past a large record-and-tape outlet. The tune floating from the speaker over the door was soft and catchy, inviting the listener to hum along. That was something else that was changing—the music. Pop music didn't seem to pound at him, *assault* him as much as it once did.

Mrs. DeMarco's restaurant had a deceptively modest façade. Inside, the decor was as luxurious as the cuisine that attracted diners from all over the state. The maitre d' nodded pleasantly and allowed

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Mr. Kouros to proceed unescorted to Mrs. DeMarco's private table—Mr. Kouros preferred it that way.

The restaurant owner was looking older and more worried than Mr. Kouros had ever seen her, but she mustered a tight smile for him. "Hello, Mr. Kouros—Mr. Furneaux isn't here yet. We'll have time to try this new pate."

Mr. Kouros murmured something appropriate as he slid into the booth next to her. The man they were waiting for had frequently declared that pate was an inexcusable affront to the palate. Mr. Kouros tasted it—it was delicious. He cleared his throat and said, "We still have time to change our minds."

"Second thoughts?"

"No. I was wondering about you."

Mrs. DeMarco shook her head. "I've been paying off that bastard for twelve years. But no more. I've reached my limit."

Mr. Kouros nodded. He'd been paying only eight years, but even that was unconscionably long. It had to be stopped. "We could just wait," he said, playing devil's advocate. "He'll kill himself eventually."

"That could take years. Besides, all dopers don't O.D. Ziegler seems to be one of the indestructible ones. He won't stop until somebody stops him."

Mr. Kouros felt a familiar rush of anger. "How I hate that man!"

"I know the feeling," Mrs. DeMarco said. Then: "He was here this morning."

"Here? What did he want?"

"He wanted to show me a jar of cockroaches he'd collected." She didn't have to explain further. Ziegler was a County Health Inspector who had the power to shut down both their businesses. The first time Ziegler had come into Mr. Kouros's shop, he pretended to find a jar of marmalade with a dead fly in it. Mr. Kouros had been slow to catch on. He'd checked his inventory and insisted that the jar wasn't part of his stock. Ziegler kept the marmalade for "evidence," and returned every day to uncover some new imaginary health violation until Mr. Kouros finally did catch on. In Mrs. DeMarco's case, Ziegler had simply dropped a dead mouse into a simmering pot of bechamel sauce.

So they both paid, month after month, for the privilege of staying open. Ziegler jotted down every payment—cash only, please—in a small spiral notebook that was never out of his possession. "Wouldn't want to cheat you," he'd smirk. Mr. Kouros and Mrs. DeMarco con-

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ferred frequently but could find no way to slip from his grasp. Their resentment grew and hardened into something poisonous as Ziegler kept increasing the amount of the payoff. But still they did nothing. The impetus for action had come from the third member of their group.

"Here's Mr. Furneaux now," Mrs. DeMarco said.

Mr. Kouros watched the other man make his entrance. Mr. Furneaux—a large man wearing his avoirdupois like a carefully chosen accessory—was, as usual, flamboyantly dressed. He was a successful wine merchant, a wealthy man, and he looked the part. The other two bought their wines from him exclusively, and the three of them had been dining together off and on for years. Mr. Furneaux had listened sympathetically as Mrs. DeMarco and Mr. Kouros complained bitterly about the Health Inspector's extortion racket—and now the wine merchant's life, too, had been contaminated by the noxious Ziegler, and in a far more personal way than theirs.

"Am I late?" he asked, looking at his watch. "No, I'm not late. Has today seemed shorter to you than most Mondays? The bird of time is on the wing and all that." He sat down. "Well. He's at his cabin at the lake. He's taken the week off from his job."

"When does your daughter plan to join him?" Mrs. DeMarco asked.

"Tomorrow. So we can't put it off."

Mr. Kouros felt honor-bound to make one more attempt. "Ziegler's a hophead. The problem may take care of itself."

"*Your* problem may take care of itself," Mr. Furneaux said, "but Diane is so besotted with the man she'll do anything he tells her. A week alone with him and she'll come back with one of those charming little metal discs implanted in her hand. I can't afford to wait. You're not backing out, are you, Mr. Kouros?"

"No, I'm with you." He had just wanted to make absolutely sure of the other two.

"Let's order," Mrs. DeMarco suggested.

Ordinarily the two men would quiz her about such matters as whether the white asparagus or the artichoke hearts were a better choice that day, but this time they made their selections quickly and without discussion. Mr. Furneaux bit into a canape and didn't seem to notice it was pate. "He doesn't give a damn about her, you know," he said. "At first he just wanted her as a bed partner, but then he found out how much money I have." Ziegler had proposed marriage to young Diane Furneaux at about the same time he'd

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notified Mr. Kouros and Mrs. DeMarco and others on his victim list that their monthly payments were going to be raised again.

Mr. Kouros didn't know about Mrs. DeMarco, but the high payments were putting a strain on his business. "How old is your daughter?" he asked Mr. Furneaux.

"Nineteen. Old enough to know better."

Mrs. DeMarco laughed humorlessly. "At that age, a girl can fall in love with a werewolf. I don't mean to be indelicate, Mr. Furneaux, but this is probably her first intense sexual relationship. That can blind you to everything else."

"She's certainly acting like a blind woman," Mr. Furneaux growled. "I've even shown her pictures of Ziegler romancing other women, embracing them intimately in public. So what does Diane do? She accuses me of faking the photographs!" Mr. Furneaux shifted his considerable weight and scowled. "*I don't want to hear about it, I don't want to talk about it*—she's been like that her entire life. And she hasn't been overprotected. Her mother and I have honestly tried to make her understand something of the way of the world. But she just closes her eyes and covers her ears whenever she runs up against anything even remotely unpleasant."

Mr. Furneaux drank some water. "She refuses to believe Ziegler's still seeing other women since they became engaged. He never *stops* seeing other women—two or three new ones every day. The man is insatiable. He can't see a woman without trying to bed her."

Mr. Kouros was worried. "You say your daughter isn't planning to join him until tomorrow? What if he has another woman with him at the cabin today?"

The wine merchant frowned. "I've been thinking about that. If there is a woman with him, we'll have to find some way to get her out of the cabin."

"*Some* way? Shouldn't we have a plan?"

"How can we? If he's not alone, we don't know where they'll be in the cabin or what they'll be doing. We'll simply have to wait until we get there."

Their food arrived. Mr. Kouros barely tasted the sorrel soup as they proceeded to eat silently, all three caught up in their own thoughts. He didn't like the possibility of a last-minute complication in the form of some unknown woman in the company of their prey. But he couldn't think what to do about it. "Maybe we should wait and let him kill himself," he said again, this time with somewhat more conviction.

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Mr. Furneaux sighed. "He's not going to overdose. The Free Drugs Program has been in effect for over a year. All the hard cases are already dead. Anyone who's survived this long is less likely to O.D. now. When was the last time you saw a dead body in the street?"

"This morning. I found one by the shop entrance when I came in."

"Oh, dear—how unpleasant for you. But remember what it was like the first month the Dispensing Centers opened? Crazies all over the place, dopers dropping like flies, corpses lying on the sidewalks, disposal teams working around the clock—remember how *awful* it was?"

"Desperate situations call for desperate remedies," Mrs. DeMarco said, repeating the incumbent President's campaign slogan.

"But it's not like that now," Mr. Furneaux went on. "The surviving dopers are doing just that—surviving. Ziegler's too shrewd to allow his taste for that white powder to be anything more than one more indulgence in his pampered life. Mr. Kouros, *we can't wait.*"

Mr. Kouros raised no further objection.

They finished lunch and waited at the front entrance while the valet brought Mr. Furneaux's Mercedes around. Mrs. DeMarco slid into the front passenger seat while Mr. Kouros climbed in back. The front seat had been pushed all the way back to allow room for Mr. Furneaux's portly figure to fit behind the steering wheel.

"It's about an hour to the lake," Mrs. DeMarco said. "If everything goes according to plan, we should be back before six."

If. All the way to the lake they talked *what if.* What if Ziegler and a woman were in the bedroom? What if they were in the kitchen? What if they had gone out? What if he were alone, after all? They considered every possibility they could think of.

"Are you absolutely certain autopsies are still not being performed on dopers?" Mr. Kouros asked the others.

"Not unless there is a suspicious wound of some kind," Mrs. DeMarco said. "The number of deaths has eased up, but the medical examiner's office still doesn't have the time or the facilities to perform all those autopsies. With overdosers, they don't bother with anything more than checking the identification disc and notifying the next of kin."

"My assistant heard they were going to start doing autopsies again."

"I've been hearing that rumor for the past six months," Mr. Furneaux said impatiently. "There's nothing to it. As long as these idiots keep registering with the government's Free Drugs Program,

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the police are going to continue to sack 'em, identify 'em, and burn 'em."

Mrs. DeMarco winced.

"Excuse the crudity of my expression, dear Mrs. DeMarco," Mr. Furneaux apologized. "I simply wanted to emphasize that the police are still rushing the bodies through assembly-line style. I had dinner with an assistant police commissioner on Saturday and he made it quite clear that the special division responsible for collecting O.D.s still regard their work as garbage disposal."

Mr. Kouros nodded, satisfied. It was a crucial point. Without that guarantee that their deed would go undetected, not one of the three friends would have found the courage to undertake an act of murder. Give them as much as they want as often as they want it—that was the present Administration's answer to a problem that had long since escaped all rational control. And the nation's addicts had co-operated by dying by the thousands, unknowingly providing Mr. Kouros, Mr. Furneaux, and Mrs. DeMarco with the cover they needed.

About a fourth of the lakefront had been cleared and turned into a resort area, but around the rest of the lake the woods ran down almost to the waterline. It was in the wooded section that Ziegler had bought a cabin, accessible only by a narrow dirt road and isolated from the resort condos. Mr. Furneaux parked off the road among the trees, and the three picked their way through the undergrowth to Ziegler's cabin. It had been built before the resort area had been developed and was beginning to show its age. Terrified of being caught, the conspirators crept around the outside, looking in through the windows.

They found Ziegler. He was lying naked on a bed, either asleep or zonked out, with a woman on each side of him.

Two women. That was one *what if* they hadn't thought of.

"Now what do we do?" Mr. Furneaux whispered in exasperation.

Mrs. DeMarco was peering through the window. "There's a syringe on the bedside table," she said, "and a spoon and some other paraphernalia. Did you know he was mainlining now? The women, too, probably."

They found an open window in the kitchen and Mr. Kouros climbed through and opened the back door to let the others in. At the bedroom door, they hesitated. One of the women on the bed with Ziegler had long red hair. The other woman was younger, her blonde hair close-

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cropped and her body slim as a boy's. All three lay like leaden things. Only the very slight movement as they breathed indicated they were alive.

Mrs. DeMarco tiptoed to the side of the bed. She lifted the arm of the red-haired woman and let it drop. There was no response. She tried it with Ziegler and the other woman and they, too, failed to respond.

Mr. Kouros, Mr. Furneaux, and Mrs. DeMarco stood looking at one another for a long moment, their mouths suddenly dry. This was it.

Ziegler was younger and presumably stronger than they, so the plan had been for the two men to restrain him while Mrs. DeMarco held a pillow over his face. But Ziegler was offering no resistance. So all three of them pressed the pillow down—and held it.

And held it.

After an eternity seemed to have passed, they took the pillow away. Breathing heavily, Mr. Kouros felt for a pulse but couldn't find one. Then he put his ear to Ziegler's chest, listening for a heartbeat that wasn't there. Mrs. DeMarco took a mirror from her purse and held it to Ziegler's lips. The mirror didn't fog. Mr. Furneaux pulled back an eyelid and looked at one dead eye.

Neither of the women on the bed had moved. "It's going to be a shock for them," Mrs. DeMarco whispered, "coming out of it and finding him like that."

"Better them than my daughter," Mr. Furneaux muttered.

They didn't linger. The drive back to town was mostly a silent one. They wouldn't know until the following morning whether they had gotten away with it or not. Every day the newspaper printed a list of new deaths from routine overdosing. If Ziegler's name showed up on that list, they were home free.

Mr. Furneaux dropped Mrs. DeMarco two blocks from her restaurant and Mr. Kouros an equal distance from his shop. Mr. Kouros checked the time: a few minutes before six. He hurried to the shop.

"Well, it's about time!" Roger greeted him explosively. "I was beginning to think you'd never come back!"

Mr. Kouros examined his assistant's eyes. The pupils looked all right. Roger was probably just tired and feeling harassed. "The doctor took longer than I thought," he said.

"Mr. Kouros, we need somebody else in here," Roger said earnestly. "It's too much for just two people to handle. And when I'm

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here alone they have me running in circles! We need more help—even part time. You can afford part-time help, can't you?"

"Perhaps I can." *Now.*

"Great! Oh, by the way, somebody from the police phoned earlier—about the guy you found in the doorway this morning. I told him you called it in."

Mr. Kouros waited until he could feel his heart beating again. "They're investigating an O.D.?"

Roger nodded. "I guess so. I told you they were going to start again. Did you know the guy?"

"No." Mr. Kouros licked his dry lips. "You go on home, Roger—I'll lock up." Roger threw both arms over his head, cheered heartily, and left.

Mr. Kouros went into his office, sank into the chair behind his desk, and dropped his head into his trembling hands. All the way back from the lake he'd held in his panic, and now he let it out in wave after wave of shuddering. His stomach heaved.

After a while, emptied of his tension, he began to think rationally again. He reached for the telephone.

"I don't understand it," Mr. Furneaux bleated. "Saturday they were not investigating overdosers, Monday they are? I don't understand it."

"Obviously your source of information isn't as reliable as you thought," Mr. Kouros said sharply.

"An assistant police commissioner?" Mr. Furneaux protested. "Who would know better than someone from the commissioner's office?"

"You misunderstood him," Mr. Kouros snapped. Then he softened. If there was an autopsy on Ziegler, he pointed out, and the police found his notebook, they would know Ziegler had been extorting money from victims other than he and Mrs. DeMarco—they would be only two of a number of suspects. The thought brought little comfort to either of them.

The first thing Mr. Kouros did the following morning was check the newspaper listings of the previous day's deaths from overdosing. There was no Ziegler on the list.

Mr. Furneaux telephoned, panic-stricken. Mr. Kouros did his best to calm him, suggesting that the police had listed Ziegler's death

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too late to make the morning editions. Mrs. DeMarco called, saying they had better meet for lunch again today.

The two phone calls made him late. By the time he arrived at the shop, Roger was waiting impatiently by the locked door along with a young Oriental who introduced himself as Sergeant Wong of the police. Mr. Kouros fumbled with the lock and let them in—he took the plainclothesman to his office while Roger began his daily check of the cheese case.

Mr. Kouros absentmindedly started making the morning coffee. "I wasn't aware the police had started investigating routine overdoses, Sergeant," he said tentatively.

"We haven't," Wong replied, sitting in the chair facing Mr. Kouros's desk. "That's not going to happen for a while yet. I'm here because the man you found in your doorway yesterday was wanted for armed robbery. The crime rate is way down now, but there will always be some. Did he ever come into your shop?"

Mr. Kouros had to concentrate on not letting his elation show. "I don't believe so," he answered carefully.

Wong fished a photograph out of his pocket. "Take another look."

Mr. Kouros stared at the morgue photo of the dead man. "No, I'm sure I'd never seen him before. You might ask my assistant, though. Armed robbery, did you say? You mean he was here to rob me?"

"Unlikely. He and a buddy had just held up a savings and loan—it's the buddy we're looking for now. No, dopers occasionally have lucid spells when they remember they have to have food to stay alive—and you sell food. He had money in his pocket. He probably just wanted to buy something. Would you ask your assistant to step in here, please?"

Roger, when summoned, looked at the photo and shook his head. "I don't know him."

"He might have come in with another man—it would have been recently."

"Sorry, Sergeant, I don't remember ever seeing that man and I've got a pretty good memory for faces."

Wong stood. "Well, it was a long shot. The buddy will probably end up in somebody else's doorway before long. They were both dopers. It was withdrawal that killed this one. Neither of them could go to a Dispensing Center for their daily fix after they were identified."

"Would you like some coffee, Sergeant?" Mr. Kouros opened a tin of Scottish shortbread.

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"It smells good, but I got a thousand places to be before noon. Thanks anyway." He nodded goodbye to both of them and left.

We're safe, we're safe, we're safe, Mr. Kouros sang silently to himself as he poured the coffee and handed his assistant a cup.

Roger tasted it. "Colombian Supremo," he said in surprise. "The same kind you made yesterday!"

"Oh?" Mr. Kouros hadn't noticed.

"You tried to trick me!" Roger grinned at him.

Mr. Kouros smiled back. "You're getting too sharp for me, Roger." He sat drinking coffee and half listening to his assistant talk about how he didn't think the policeman had noticed the disc in his hand, inwardly exulting over the good news Sergeant Wong had inadvertently brought him. Ziegler's name would be on tomorrow's list in the newspaper; his death was not being investigated. They'd panicked over nothing.

When Roger finished his coffee and went back out into the shop, Mr. Kouros reached for the phone to let his friends know—but then pulled his hand back. He'd be seeing them in a few hours at Mrs. DeMarco's restaurant; he'd tell them in person. He smiled in pleasure at the thought of the expressions on their faces.

In the shop, four customers were being kept waiting while Roger patiently explained to a belligerent-looking man that the rice crackers he'd bought the day before were not stale, they were supposed to taste that way. Mr. Kouros went out and helped. When the last of the waiting customers had been taken care of and he was heading back toward his office, the shop door opened again. He glanced over his shoulder to see two women coming in.

One woman had an abundant head of hair that Mr. Kouros knew was naturally red. The other was younger, with close-cropped blonde hair and a body as slim as a boy's.

He stood paralyzed as the two women said something to Roger, who nodded and gestured toward Mr. Kouros.

They took their time approaching, looking him over from head to toe. "Well?" the red-haired woman asked her companion.

The blonde nodded, her eyes gleaming. "He's one of them."

The redhead turned a slow, dazzling smile on him. "Perhaps we could go into your office, Mr., ah—" she consulted a small spiral notebook in her hand "—Mr. Kouros? We need to talk in private."

Stunned, Mr. Kouros led them into his office and closed the door. He stood staring at the two women he'd seen for the first time only yesterday and then backed away toward his chair, putting the desk

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between him and them. The redhead sat in the chair facing his desk and the blonde took another chair in the corner. "What do you want?" Mr. Kouros asked leadenly.

The redhead held up the spiral notebook. "Do you know what this is, Mr. Kouros?"

He didn't answer. It was Ziegler's notebook, the one in which he'd recorded his payoffs.

"I see that you do," the woman went on. "What you don't know is that my friend here was awake yesterday afternoon."

He glanced at the blonde, who nodded. "You and a dark-haired woman and a fat man. I watched you kill him. You held a pillow over his face until he suffocated."

Mr. Kouros couldn't have answered her if he'd wanted to.

"You frightened her, you know," the redhead said reproachfully. "She didn't know what to do—so she played dead. And kept her eyes open a slit, just enough to make sure she could identify all three of you."

Mr. Kouros worked his mouth, said nothing.

"I'll bet you were worried when his name didn't show up in the papers this morning, weren't you?" the redhead went on. "Well, the police don't know anything about him. We took care of that for you, Mr. Kouros."

He had to swallow twice before he could speak. "Where is he?"

"In the lake. In a spot only my friend and I can locate. Do you want us to take the police there?" She smiled lazily.

"What do you want?" he asked hoarsely.

"I think you know what we want." She held up the notebook for him to see one more time and then dropped it in her purse. "We knew he'd been ripping people off for ages, and now we know who they are. So we thought we'd go through the names in his notebook until we found the three my friend here saw yesterday. You're the first. I don't suppose you'd care to save us some time and tell us which of the others in the book your two friends are?"

He glared at her.

She gave a mock sigh. "Well, we'll find them sooner or later. Now—" she leaned forward in her chair "—my friend and I will be around at the first of each month to collect. Same arrangement—cash only. You understand?"

Mr. Kouros fought down a wave of nausea and croaked, "I'm to pay you now instead of him. I'm right back where I started."

"Well, not exactly," the redhead said apologetically. "You're to

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pay the same amount—but to each of us. Double payments from now on, Mr. Kouros. That's what you get for being so naughty." The blonde in the corner giggled.

"Double payments? I can't make double payments!"

"Sure you can," the redhead said easily. "You'll find a way. And remember, if you ever think of *not* paying, all we have to do is phone an anonymous tip to the police." Both women stood up. "It's the middle of the month now. We'll be back in a couple of weeks. So you see, you'll have a little time to figure out how to get the extra money." She opened the door but paused to add, "If you run into your two friends in the meantime, tell them we'll be around to see them before long." She gave him her dazzling smile and left, followed by the blonde, who looked back and winked at him.

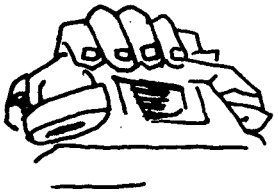
Mr. Kouros sat for a long time staring at nothing. Double payments! Where was he going to get the money? He'd been better off with Ziegler.

It was intolerable. His financial bondage to Ziegler had driven him to an act of desperation he'd never thought himself capable of—but instead of solving his problem, it had left him in deeper than ever. How could he get rid of these two women? He couldn't kill again. He knew he couldn't kill again.

He thought he couldn't kill again.

Two weeks. They had two weeks in which to come up with a plan. Mr. Kouros glanced at his watch and saw it was time to leave for Mrs. DeMarco's restaurant. Two weeks wasn't very long. They'd have to start working on a plan immediately, today. And this time there couldn't be any mistakes.

He told Roger he'd be taking a longer lunch than usual and left, wondering how to find the right words to tell his friends what they had to do.



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From America's #1 Financial Adviser

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Mystery fiction offers a nice diversity. This time we have three private investigators; four policemen, one operating in the international-intrigue arena; and an amateur sleuth.

Let's begin with the policemen. The first of M. C. Beaton's novels about Hamish Macbeth, *Death of a Gossip,* was an unalloyed joy. The second, *Death of a Cad* (St. Martin's, $13.95), is another gem, full of charm and grace, of characters irresistible and detestable. Macbeth is the sole policeman in the village of Lochdubh, in the Scottish highlands. He's a gangly sort, with a shock of red hair, and with an ability to hide a considerable intelligence under convincing displays of idiocy. He pines after the unattainable—Priscilla Hallburton-Smythe, whose parents think of Hamish, when they think of him at all, as an oafish specimen of a lesser species. Priscilla has got herself engaged to Henry Withering, all the rage as a London playwright, and in celebration a gaggle of folks descends on the Hallburton-Smythe castle. Murder comes, too.

Joseph Koenig, reporter and author of true-crime accounts, debuts with *Floater* (Mysterious Press, $16.95). Buck White, a sheriff—and a black—in Florida near the Everglades, lost his wife to a local strangler. Clues absent, progress nil. Meanwhile, White's area is visited by Norodny, fresh out of a Canadian jail and back to his trade: wooing, winning, and wasting wealthy women. The results of his handiwork turn up here and there, as slippery Norodny finds a colleague of similar tastes and they expand their enterprises. But they leave the odd clue and White starts picking them up. This tale has much of force and vigor, less of discipline and polish.

The sixth in Dorothy Simpson's good series about Inspector Luke Thanet is *Dead on Arrival* (Scribners, $14.95). Thanet has the murder of a much despised young man named Steven Long to contend with. The dead man's family provides a sufficiency of suspects, but the father of a girl Long killed in a traffic accident is quite available as well. On the side, Chief Inspector Hines, Thanet's superior and an ultimate boor, is dragging Thanet's face through his failure to solve the Long murder and Hines' own apparent success in the case of a dead prostitute. Another pleasant story, with humanizing domestic detail and effective byplay.

John Howlett's *Murder of a Moderate Man* (St. Martin's, $15.95) is convoluted spy stuff, with the villainy practiced by folks we may piously—if vainly—hope don't do such stuff in reality. Veltri, an Italian, is under investigation for illegal arms dealings. Parviz Vaziree, an Iranian held in a desert prison

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by his countrymen for the past three years, is loaned to the British to shed light on Veltri's affairs. Morgan Hunter-Brown of Interpol is assigned as a sort of bodyguard, but his work goes poorly. Beginning with some of Vaziree's colleagues, long in hiding but brought to light through Parviz's appearance, people begin to fall to a nameless assassin. Employed by whom? Better, perhaps, not to ask. A lively tale, ultimately grim and unsettling in its messages.

Fanciers of Ted Wood's novels about smalltown Canadian policeman Reid Bennett, of whom I am definitely one, will want to know about Wood's latest pseudonymous venture, *Hammerlocke* (Scribners, $13.95), as by "Jack Barnao." This is quite a different matter, with its setting in Florence, Italy, and in its rather unsatisfying hero. John Locke, bodyguard, operates out of Toronto. He's very self-sufficient, to the point of smugness, though his task of protecting young Herbie Ridley for several weeks of art exploration in Florence does not show him at his best. Herbie comes from money, and it's money his kidnapers want when Locke can't keep Herbie from the snatchers. Herbie's revolting father turns up, bristling accusations and intrigues, and Locke is soon up to his vulnerable neck in terrorists and schemers of several shades. Wood/Barnao certainly writes well, but Locke is a bit too Bondish and stereotypical; perhaps in promised future adventures he'll grow a bit more flesh and likeability.

Charlie Bradshaw, ex-cop and sometimes private detective in Saratoga Springs, New York, returns for a fourth time in *Saratoga Snapper* (Viking, $15.95) by Stephen Dobyns. Charlie, whose detecting business does not flourish, is cursed by the contrast of successful relatives, including now his mother, whose refurbished Bentley Hotel is a huge success. Charlie is standing in as night manager for a time. A friend, Victor, makes a minor living taking and selling pictures of celebrating hotel guests. But he seems to have taken an offensive snapshot: someone breaks a rich variety of Victor's bones and steals his camera. The police, who do not number Charlie among their favorite people, take Victor's plight lightly. Not so Charlie, who between hospital visits to Victor tries to track the people portrayed on his last role of film. While cops, in mounting irritation, play catch up. These Bradshaw tales are very well done, and this is no exception: flowing narrative, engaging characters, appealing dynamics.

Dan Roman was born in East Texas and does his private eyeing down that way, according to Edward Mathis, who provides further evidence in *Dark Streaks and Empty Places* (Scribners, $13.95). The Beechums are self-made Texas money—timber money. One of their number has gone missing, and old Macomber Beechum hires Roman to find his granddaughter Sandy. Sandy's husband is not much interested or worried, and Dan follows the trail south to a commune, then back to murder. Is Sandy a victim or a killer, and what's be-

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hind all the dying? Roman is in some respects the archetypal private sleuth (single, once married) with an archetypal investigation (finding a missing woman), but he has some private income and so can pick his cases, and refreshingly he fails to have sex with anyone here, despite opportunity. And Mathis is a gifted writer; his story is truly gripping, as it comes at last to deal with one of the horrors of our "advanced" society.

Audrey Peterson, a professor of literature in California, debuts with *The Nocturne Murder* (Arbor House, $14.95). This is quite pleasing in style and story line and well staffed with interesting subsidiary characters. However, the heroine, a music scholar named Jane Winfield, is rather a superficial creature, something of a sexual dilettante, and I have no great desire to meet her again. Winfield, a Californian, travels to London to research an obscure English composer. She's recovering from a failed love affair and promptly pops into bed with a stylish older music critic. Who has the bad form to turn up murdered in her flat. The police, aided by an array of damning evidence, charge Jane with the crime. Good thing she has friends, most particularly her thesis advisor, the good Professor Andrew Quentin, whose musical talents are well mixed with the sleuthly. Peterson's first novel shows welcome promise.

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ORGANIC GARDENING

by D. FRANKLIN BEABER

A gardener fellow named Loomis
Killed his wife, according to rumus.
But he buried her bod
Down deep in the sod
And the cops have got no sense of humus.

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introducing a new series by

JEFFRY SCOTT

All Jojo's expressions were scaled to some personal silent movie which never ended. It was a mystery to her daughter Moya, Jojo having done so well on the West End stage. Her success in the recent TV serial was a joke. Half Britain—the male half—had lusted after its star while the critics extolled her masterly touches of satire, the implicit mockery of sex-symbolism.

Whoever said "like mother, like daughter," or its equivalent, didn't have it completely right, as Jeffry Scott, in spite of his busy job with the London Daily Mail *(doubling as film* and *theater critic when he sent this), is here to tell you . . .*

JOJO AND THE TETHERED GOAT

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Greenish eyes narrowed, voice throbbing with significance for a deeply serious topic, Jojo declared, "There's no such thing as fashion any more—everybody wears anything, as and when they see fit. But I'm *so* glad minis are back."

She wasn't kidding, Moya brooded. Sarcasm was wasted, but what the hell. "Yes, I suspected you'd be glad." Jojo was wearing something in white leather, less minimal than possible to miss entirely at a swift glance. But then Jojo wasn't in the swift-glances business—around her you were talking bedazzled stares. Lord, the mini and black-lace tights with matching, wetly shiny stiletto-heeled shoes and a dazzling white-angora sweater, soft as Jojo's skin and capturing a few honey-yellow strands where that artfully negligent cascade of elf-locks and ringlets touched its shoulders.

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Moya wanted to explode, "What do you think you look like, Mother?" It wasn't compassion that forbade such cruelty. Jojo looked exactly the way she wanted to look, which was fantastic. Not even Moya knew how old she was, apart from fully old enough to act her age, and still Jojo was a knockout, of all the infuriating, beastly *unfairness*.

"The snag is," Jojo conceded, misreading her cherished only daughter's frown, "one needs the legs for it and yours aren't from my side of the family. But your eyes, they're good, and you have a perky little bosom if only you'd make an effort and stick it out a bit and smile."

"Mother dear, I have nothing to smile about."

Jojo looked puzzled. No, she looked wits-end baffled. All her expressions were scaled to some personal silent movie which never ended. It was a mystery to Moya, Jojo having done so well on the West End stage. Her success in the recent TV serial was a joke. Half Britain—the male half—had lusted after its star while the critics extolled her masterly touches of satire, the implicit mockery of sex-symbolism. Rubbish—she'd just played Jojo, firmly restrained by a gay director at that.

Jojo's expression stayed. "Haven't you, sweetie? I'm grinning like a maniac day and night. Lovely stuff keeps happening if only you let it."

"I bet," Moya commented drily. Jojo's charge statement from Harrod's lay open beside the telephone—she had gone back to buying Sea Island cotton shirts a dozen at a time. In the bathroom, supremely feminine, there was the faintest breath of aftershave. "Far be it from me to lecture you about one-night stands, Mother dear, that would be tantamount to some weekend yachtsman giving boat-building lessons to Noah. But I'm recovering from one that lasted six months. That bastard *used* me." Paradoxically, Moya was starting to feel better. Visits to Jojo were infuriating, but along with that went a measure of therapy.

"Oh, they will." Jojo was matter-of-fact. "Use them right back, darling, only first. I used your father like mad, bless him, *and* he knew it, *and* it was all super—we loved it."

"Robin wasn't like that," Moya protested illogically. "He wasn't a taker, he wasn't a phony—" The therapy was brief, she was crying now. "Listen to me. He was and he is, running away like that."

Cowards are supposed to run away, that is one of the things they

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are for. Ironically, Robin Kedward had warned her about it, too. Something had made her ask when he'd been in the Army, and after a startled instant he'd joked, "Me? Soldiering? No thanks, I'm a card-carrying coward from way back."

Before she could tell him about Betty's Arnold, who wasn't much but had this fantastic thing with faces, Robin amplified the denial. "My hair's a bit grey and it's going fast, but I'm not that ancient. National Service was over when I left school, and if it had still been going—conscription at eighteen—depend on it, I'd have fiddled my way out. I'm an engineer—at least I was before they made me redundant—and God willing I will be again. I fix things, I make things, I improve things. I hate destruction."

In hindsight, Moya gave him credit for telling the truth in the final three words. Their sincerity had been genuine—unlike the rest, she was sure.

Betty was older, gabbier, not a close friend, but they held down neighboring desks at work, swapping occasional lunch-break sandwiches and frequent conversation. Robin wasn't at all the gregarious sort, but out with him in the West End one Saturday they'd run into Betty and her husband, and with an apologetic grimace Moya told him privately that the Forsyths would suggest stopping off at the nearest wine bar and, please, she had to work with the woman—just a quick drink?

"What did you say your feller does for a living?" Betty had probed the following Monday.

"He's between jobs," Moya had stalled, reluctant to admit that Robin had never really told her. "Don't look like that, Bet, he's not sponging off me. Robin got a golden handshake from his last firm."

"That's all right then. It's only that my Arnold isn't much, but he does have this fantastic thing with faces and he's sure he ran into Robin in the Army somewhere. Ask Robin about it. Put Arnold out of his misery—it's driving him potty, trying to remember."

So Moya had asked. Robin's virtual snubbing of the query had not bothered her—then. Perceptions of people depend partly on words, interpretations: Betty the outsider might have considered Robin secretive and even shifty, while at the time Moya knew that he was almost comically modest—bored and uneasy when talking about himself.

Looking back, she couldn't believe the speed of their affair. It wouldn't have struck Jojo that way—leaden-paced, if anything—but

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Robin had become Moya's lover less than a month after she first set eyes on him. A record.

Flirtation and seduction had not entered into it—neither one was like that. Before Robin, Moya had been close to only two men, marrying the second. Julian had been a mistake, although that was like calling Krakatoa an earth tremor. It had been a nightmare marriage and nearly as bad a divorce and Moya found no trouble in staying celibate for more than a year afterward.

Then Robin moved into the flat across the corridor and friendship had been instant, both secretly amazed at the ease and rightness of sharing time together. They'd dated—films, a Saturday at the zoo—parting sedately and by mutual consent in the apartment block's foyer, Robin generally mumbling that he must check on his mail (he got none apart from junk stuff) while she went ahead in the lift.

Within three outings they were holding hands for the comfort of it, virtually by reflex, and when Moya gave him dinner in her flat he'd said, "I wish I didn't have to go home." She would have betted her life that he'd been thinking aloud. And she heard herself saying, "Then don't. I'd like that."

So he didn't. *Damn him.*

In effect, their apartments became one, with an unusually large public hallway between. They cooked and slept in Moya's and watched TV on Robin's rented set in his. They agreed how good it was to have different spaces, not jostling each other and fraying nerves—and were inseparable.

Until the evening Moya got back from work and hastened into Robin's place. Each had keys to both apartments and she expected him to be in his official home, probably working at the draughtsman's table set up in the living room. She thought there was a strange echo as she went down the long hall and then her heart turned over because the flat was empty—the echo came from there being little furniture and no carpet on the wood-blocks floor.

The letter had been left in her flat. Moya kept reading it, against her will, long after it had been ripped up in rage and grief. *"I need to get away for a while. I'll always be more grateful than you can understand. It is the best thing for both of us. You may feel bitter that I never said goodbye but if things work out this isn't goodbye."*

Now that was rich. Not goodbye. He had just decamped and vanished with no forwarding address. What did he call that—hello? It wasn't enough to exploit her and flee, he wanted to establish a

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parting image of himself as Mr. Nice Guy and sell callous desertion as some kind of self-sacrifice. Apart from that, in key with its writer, Robin's letter hadn't said much, especially in the way of information.

That was more than a month ago now. Yet the sting of disappointment and that awful sinking of heart and spirits—yes, and the strange, jolting sensation, primitive alarm similar to reaching for your purse and remembering that it had been left on the bus, for instance—kept returning as freshly as ever.

How could Robin have done it, especially after she had nerved herself to telling him of her earlier heartbreak?

Easily, came the answer in her head, making her smile bitterly.

Surfacing from the reverie, she discovered that Jojo's eyes were narrowed again, this time in suspicion. "Are you listening, darling?"

"Hanging on every other word."

Jojo sipped Malvern water drowning a spiral shaving of lemon rind—tippling was not among her vices—and sighed. "I should hope so, too. Where was I? Yes, *Darren*. Deliciously vulgar and common, suits him to a T. No class whatsoever but, my dear, the energy! He takes me to the pub and the disco. We meet his, um, 'mates' and their 'ladies.' " Putting invisible quotation marks around the labels, Jojo might have been using Latin tags. "It's a different world, darling. They were 'fellers' and 'birds' in the Sixties. The 'mates' are rather sweet and deferential and the 'ladies' *seethe* with spite—to them I'm a wicked old bird who has to buy a boy friend.

"It's all nonsense, of course. I must be costing Darren a pretty penny. That young man's no fool—well, to be frank he's an absolute cretin, but he knows that many a good tune is played on an old violin."

"Mo-*ther!*"

Jojo blinked, pursed her lips, and turned sulky. "You're such a dragon, darling, and the teeniest bit of a prig. I never said he'd played anything. You ought to be proud of your *valiant* old mum, sallying forth to capture a toy boy in the twilight of her years. Gloaming, actually, not quite twilight—there are still lovely shafts of sunlight."

Her mind busy, suspicion forming, Moya tuned out the prattle. She was thinking about her apartment block. There was a vile, smirking youth with enough oil on his blue-black overlong hair to have implications for OPEC. "Darren?"

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"You know him, darling," Jojo crowed. "He's one of your porters at Buxley Court."

"Oh, God. I've read about women like you. They get murdered or blackmailed, they end up in the Sunday papers. You and your blasted violins!"

Drawing herself up, Jojo said, "Do you or do you not want to have things out with stuffy Robin Kedward? We can do the sermon later, just answer the question—yes or no? Because frivolous, *disgusting* Mumsie has made it her business to track him down."

Confused, angry, Moya snapped, "Stop changing the subject! As for sermons, I never asked you to gloat about your squalid social life, Mother dear."

Rarely for her, Jojo was nonplussed. Then she smiled crookedly. "You can be a terrible dumbo, darling. I wasn't gloating. Bragging possibly, but not gloating.

"The fact is that you can get Robin because I got Darren. It's obvious to the most pathetic intelligence, even mine, that you won't be happy until you've found and faced the wretched chap and either slapped his face or fallen into his arms, curtain, applause, all take their bows. The apartments' agency said *elusive* Mr. Kedward left no forwarding address and that was that. Except that is *never* that.

"Among virile Darren's endowments is a terribly long nose for other people's business. You're so unobservant and something of a snob, Moya, staff are invisible to you, but I picked it up the first time I went to Buxley Court. So I proceeded to pick Darren up as well—hardly a challenge—and suggested that if we were to become, let's say, cozy, he should find out where Robin went."

Jojo drew a deep breath, giving her delectable bosom a complacent peek in the process. "Simple as that, darling, and mildly amusing into the bargain. Well, I have the new address and it's the other side of London, so shall we hit the road?"

"I doubt this is the best idea we ever had," Moya nagged.

Jojo, a different personality at the wheel of a car—incisive, rapid, overbearing—scoffed. "Good, shmood, who cares? You know you can't resist finding out what he's up to. Out of my way, peasant"—this to a delivery truck trying to occupy its share of two lanes, straight up the middle.

"Robin's a compulsive liar, that I do know," Moya said. "He denied being in the Army. When he did the dirty on me, Betty's husband got sort of obsessed and went through all his old photograph albums.

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Robin was in one of the groups, a beach barbecue on Cyprus. Arnold remembered a bit more then—he's sure Robin was a Regular officer, captain in the Royal Engineers."

Serious for once, Jojo suggested, "Uniforms cover a multitude of sinners, darling. I know he's boring and steady and inarticulate and all the other things you dream of in your ideal man, but Robin might be—well, a crook."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

Having imposed her will on a dawdling bus and given a stubborn taxi driver a fright, Jojo regained the correct side of the road and said, "Some of Robin's gear, the drawing-board affair and so forth, got picked up by a van the morning he vanished. Darren knew the driver by sight and wormed the destination out of him. It turned out to be an address down by the TV Centre in West London and it was a fake—no such number on the street.

"But *staunch* Darren was very keen to maintain diplomatic relations with me, so he kept nosing around, and a girl in the cafe on the corner of that street remembered the van arriving and the stuff from it being transferred to *another* van. I mean, R. Kedward Esquire was covering his tracks with a vengeance."

Heart clenching within a chilly, empty space, Moya said, "It'll turn out to be something downbeat and normal, like him being married with six kids." She shrugged moodily. "How did Darren locate him, anyway?"

"He didn't, in the end. But he did very much want to take me out again, so on went his thinking cap—and what he thought was that Robin had rented a VCR machine and the hire firm collected it the day he moved out. Being the noticing sort, Darren spotted the firm's name on the van and luckily another of his mates works there. *Clive.*"

Jojo sighed theatrically. "Clive is Darren writ large, you might say, but he's a twit. Darren calls him a Jobsworth—anything you ask Clive to do is 'more than his job's worth.'

"Anyway, Darren hoped Robin would have hired another video machine once he settled into his new place. After *much* pleading from yours truly, wearing my eyelashes to a nubbin, darling, Clive checked the company's computer. Robin hadn't hired another, but it didn't matter. One pays a hefty deposit which isn't returned until the recorder has been checked for damage. Robin applied for his refund and the address he gave for sending the check, his new address, was there in the memory banks. *Voila.*"

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Moya cleared her throat. "You did some job. You must be quite fond of me."

"Middling so," her mother agreed crisply. A great memorizer of street maps, she was slicing through unknown, Outer London territory with confidence. "Top of the hill, first left, over the railway bridge, and that should be Waterlow Rise."

Both women were startled at the defeated street and Moya was depressed. Some parts of North London are better than others but this was not one of them. Waterlow Rise was dying, several of its meanly scaled, early Edwardian buildings falling down while others had been or were about to be knocked down.

"Robin's hardly gone up in the world," Jojo remarked needlessly. "The address is number twenty."

"Can't be," said Moya, "that's the derelict shop over there." But then she spotted an upper window, bottom half wearing a yashmak of dingy net curtain, with a drip-dry shirt on a wire hanger suspended above.

"Yes," Jojo agreed, following her gaze, "there's a flat—hardly a trendy bachelor pad, but then who'd accuse Robin of being trendy? The door must be round the side, in the alley."

Finally, they left the car. The frontage of the abandoned shop was a quilt-pattern of posters for bygone pop shows and street markets. As Jojo had predicted, there was a peeling door at the side—the main one had long since been nailed shut.

To reach it, one walked down a trench of an alley, in permanent shade cast by another derelict building across the way—the alley's far end blocked by a brick wall. The place was inches deep in discarded Kentucky Fried Chicken cartons, plastic beakers, empty beer cans. "Funny," Jojo muttered, stirring the sidewalk garbage with a chisel toe. "Funny peculiar."

"Grotty," Moya contradicted, pressing the bell before she could lose her nerve and run away without facing Robin. She expected a long wait for him—or Mrs. Robin with the Kiddies, knowing her luck—to get downstairs.

But the door opened at once. Moya and her mother didn't step in, they were snatched and hauled over the threshold, and the door slammed shut behind them.

Nobody threatened them but none of the men, and there seemed to be a number of them, would disclose who or what they were. Jojo and Moya had been hustled down a long, narrow hall into a star-

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tlingly large room. Moya decided that it had to be the derelict shop, and that was wrong somehow.

From the street, the shop had seemed a shell, dark and dustily empty. An illusion. There were several desks, telephones, a filing cabinet, and strip lights glowed softly, casting a bright and even illumination.

The evident leader, a bank-managerly man in a dark suit, was repeating a quarter hour later, "Some kind of crossed wires, then, ladies. There's no Mr. Kedward here. Never has been."

Jojo, perceptibly rattled to Moya's trained ear, said, "So you keep insisting. You've browbeaten my daughter into showing you her ID and telling you my name but just who the devil are *you?"*

"The tenant," Bank Manager replied, more promptly than smoothly. "We're developers, Mrs. Paxton." Jojo loathed being addressed as Mrs. Paxton—it made her feel matronly, Moya knew. Unaware of that thorn, Bank Manager beamed meaninglessly and skidded into being patronizing. "Nothing to go up in the air about, Mrs. Paxton. We have every right to be here, ask the borough council. We like to keep a low profile while we get our plans shipshape, that's all, make sure property values don't skyrocket. That—"

"Would be right over my fluffy little head?" Jojo supplied sweetly. "My dear man, you're talking to the widow of somebody who built *towns* in Africa and South America while you were still pounding a beat. You are a copper and all these strong, silent oafs are coppers." She wheeled, pointing at a cherubic youth sitting on a trestle table and swinging his feet. "All except him, and he's an SAS trooper. Now what have you done with my daughter's fiance?"

Sliding off the table to prowl closer, the cherub revealed himself as a round-faced, chunky individual of thirty or more. "What's this Mrs. Paxton stuff? You're Joy Lorraine—I've worshipped those legs ever since you did *Sinful Sarah* on telly. I taped every episode." He beamed.

"Too kind." Jojo contrived to sway closer and melt without measurably moving. Moya glared at her. "Mother, Robin isn't my fiance."

Jojo laid a hand on the cherub's arm, turning conspirator. "Don't listen to her. They had a lovers' tiff, you know how it is. Can't she have just the teeniest wordette with Robin? Please?"

"Certainly not," Bank Manager roared, before reddening and adding in a strangled snarl, "he's not here. We never heard of him, are you deaf or something? Clear off."

"All right, we will. Straight to the *Sunday Times*. I have a great

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chum there who's an investigative reporter and I owe him a favor. He should be fascinated by this project."

Over by the phones, half hidden behind a partition, a man with his back to them looked up sharply. Moya flinched at the abrupt clamping down of palpable tension. *And the man with his back to them, something about him—*

Bank Manager said thinly, "You're hysterical, madam. Go to the papers? Saying what, for goodness sake?"

Jojo appeared to have lost her head. She laughed breathlessly. "The bleating of the goat attracts the tiger." Bank Manager gave Moya an inquiring, half sympathetic look, making her warm with embarrassment.

"I mean," Jojo went on, "you're running an ambush here. Well, aren't you? This place is done up to look deserted but it's crawling with fuzz and Special Forces and what-have-you. There are more watchers hidden in the place across the alley. They should be discreet, stop tossing their take-away snacks out of the windows. The nearest fried-chicken outlet is two miles away down the hill and no casual passer-by treks all that way to a dead-end alley just to discard his wrappings."

"Like it." The cherub confided in nobody in particular. "She got you there, Super, bang to rights." He wandered away, whistling between his teeth.

Bank Manager, smooth, heavy face darkening, choked, "Now you've made a lot of needless trouble for yourself—"

The man came out from behind the partition. "Stop it, leave her alone!" he cried. "Moya, I'm sorry about this. Superintendent, either I get some time alone with this girl or you can try running this without me."

The cherub jerked his thumb at the door to the hallway. "Out there, Robbo. The front's covered and I'll guard the rear." Moya was out of the room before understanding that Robin was back with her.

First the kiss—so gentle and tender, obviously needed by Robin as much as herself, that her tears scalded and she clutched him fiercely.

"I didn't want to hurt you," Robin groaned, and she kept repeating, "It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter." Then, getting control, she stepped back, peering at him in the gloom. "What's going on, why are you here? Why—"

He touched a finger to her lips. "I was in the Army. I dealt with

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bombs, booby traps, explosive devices—not making them, stopping them going off. Over the water in Ulster and—various places." He grimaced and glanced away, mechanically stroking her shoulder. "I was pretty damned good at it. By the end there was a price on my head.

"And by the end I was burned out pretty well. Glad to finish . I didn't want to talk about it, think about it, admit it had been in my life. Then there was us, you and me, and starting fresh meant something.

"Only it wasn't over. There's a group my work damaged fairly badly. They wanted my head on their clubroom wall.

"That's when—one of my civilian bosses from the Army time came back into the picture, earlier this year. It had become very urgent to close this group down, neutralize it. He needed bait. Like arranging a leak, giving them a line on where I was living."

Clutching him again, Moya whispered, "You're waiting here for them to kill you?" Her throat closed and the hallway lurched momentarily as if she was drunk.

"It won't come to that." Robin hugged her. "They're the ones in danger, the Other Side. I'm not all that brave, I wouldn't be here if it was a gamble. Your mother got it right. —I thought you told me she was scatty? Anyway, I'm being guarded by the best and nothing will happen to me."

He shook her gently. "Hey, still with me? This is a job that has to be done. I couldn't tell you. In case you did, well, what you've just done. This time it was okay, but you could have gotten hurt. —I had to make a snap decision. They mounted this operation months sooner than expected. I decided I'd rather risk losing you than expose you to danger. I've been half crazy ever since, wondering if I *had* lost you. If it helps, I've been having a lousy time."

"Poor you. I've been having a smashing life. Oh Robin, I ought to—I don't know what. I love you, anyway."

"Thank God for that," Robin acknowledged. "Look, they'll need to know how you found me. All that stuff about wanting you to leave was hooey, you and your mother will be detained within a mile of here and whisked off to some office or other and grilled for Lord knows how long."

"It doesn't matter. Not now. I can't stay here with you? No, of course I can't. Robin, how long will it take?"

Spirits rising, Robin said, "How long is a piece of string? Not more than another two weeks, the spooks promise. Then I'm free, it'll be

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over—properly over for good. I want us to get married. If you'll have me."

"I will," said Moya.

Robin was mistaken. Jojo and Moya weren't grilled interminably—simply for the rest of the afternoon, at a deceptively ordinary office block near Hyde Park, and on into the early evening. They were interviewed in different rooms. Toward 7:00 P.M. Moya signed the Official Secrets Act and was escorted to the front door.

In time to see Jojo's car dashing out of the basement park, horn tooting jauntily. Jojo's passenger wore a khaki sweater and, even at a distance, in silhouette, had a cherubic air.

The commissionaire, gravely amused, said, "Your mother left you a note, Miss. What a rare lady she is—makes a chap feel ten feet tall and twenty years younger."

The note ran, *"See, you did want boring R. Kedward after all. Surprise, surprise. Delete Darren, substitute Soldier Blue. Bless you, darling—off for violin practice."*

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a *NEW* short story by

GRAY USHER

Gray Usher is the father of Shaun Usher, a.k.a. Jeffry Scott, author of the previous story and many others in EQMM over the years. Now here *the expression "like father, like son" definitely seems to apply. Both Shaun and Gray are fiction writers and journalists—and, in fact, Shaun has a son with published fiction to his credit who is now making a name for* himself *in Fleet Street as well.*

In a recent letter, Shaun wrote of his 83-year-old ("at least he admits to that") father: "Of course, Gray has been a more successful writer than me—half a dozen detective novels and two historicals published in the Fifties and Sixties, a legion of paperback-thriller originals, plus our two joint collections of horror stories." In an interview in EQMM five years ago, Shaun (as Jeffry Scott) said: "My father is the nicest and most admirable guy I know. When any pleasant male character walks into my work, you can be sure Gray is standing beside him, blinking and puffing his pipe and nodding approvingly from time to time."

And what of Gray Usher's own pleasant male characters? Whoever Professor Nigel Konnor and Superintendent George Greatly are patterned after, we'd like to know them . . .

THE BUTTERFLY CASE

by GRAY USHER

Professor Nigel Konnor of the University of Wessex was secretly unsure whether he was rather a nice fellow, a closet altruist with the door often ajar, or just a selfish beast intent on protecting

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his own comfort. Not that he cared a straw either way. And either way, Konnor became knight errant on behalf of a certain Ada Withypool.

No sane person would have termed poor old Ada a maiden fair. It was all rather odd and unlikely, if only because none of Professor Konnor's colleagues suspected him of softheartedness. People trust stereotypes and like making snap judgments. Nigel Konnor looked more like an actor or male model than a British academic (whatever *they're* supposed to look like), ran the wrong car for a sedately obscure university, and even in casual wear seemed dressed with worryingly expensive care. Yet Konnor had served in the SAS, which defused any snide jokes about his style. Altogether a daunting, not to mention irritating personality.

Mrs. Withypool wasn't daunted. Once upon a time she would have been called the professor's daily woman, but on Wessex University employment records Ada was a domestic assistant. She'd been looking after his rooms for more than three years, arriving on the dot of nine A.M. and without fuss, exceeding rather than matching Konnor's finicky standards. They respected each other, exchanged hardly a word beyond conventional greetings, and liked it that way.

Now she was late—very late. Which was to say closer to twenty minutes than a quarter of an hour, tantamount to Big Ben being more or less accurate or a Guards regiment being fairly smart. Konnor, not a breakfasting person, was on his second cup of black coffee and penultimate crossword clue when Ada Withypool appeared. More alarmingly yet, Mrs. Withypool was talking from the instant of crossing his threshold.

"The police came and took him away, sir!" Prosaic, wholesome, and unglamorous as the cottage loaf her figure resembled, Mrs. Withypool blinked her reddened eyes, bit her lip, and added belatedly, "Can I have a word, Professor? About my Arthur?"

Konnor tossed *The Times* aside without regret. It was turning into a thoroughly trashy sort of paper, he reflected, even the crossword succumbing to a hint of slangy smart-alecry. He nearly observed that Mrs. Withypool could have a word with him and indeed had already delivered several, whether she might was another matter.

The woman's distress made him ashamed of such pedantry. "Sit down, my dear. What has Arthur been up to?" His tone made it clear the offense had to be petty, an embarrassment rather than a disaster. Mrs. Withypool's only son was an exemplary youth. Yet Professor

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Konnor still liked him. Arthur's consuming interest was archaeology, which explained part of that response. Arthur Withypool was the kind of earnest teenager lacking a nickname—currently awaiting the results of his O-level examinations while already plodding toward the commanding heights of the A-levels and thence to a foregone place at university. Konnor thought well enough of the boy to be pressing for him to be given a part-time job in the department of archaeology during the long summer holiday from school.

Worthy young Arthur's mother had begun crying, silently yet messily. "The police took him away," she wailed.

Nonplussed, Konnor gave her a grey-eyed, heavy-lidded stare, smoothing a palm over his naturally wavy blond hair. "Taken him? Impossible!"

"They done it," she blurted with the force of desperation. "They say he's stolen money—leastways, some old coins worth money. It's all the same. Of course he isn't a thief, my Ah-ha-*thur*." Weeping no longer silent.

Konnor passed her a large, elegant, and clinically clean handkerchief. "We take that as read, my dear. Now blow your nose, calm down, and explain."

Mrs. Withypool did her best to obey.

"Arthur went to the Town Museum yesterday afternoon with that notebook of his. Wanted to make more of his precious lists. He wasn't gone all that long, I hadn't even started his tea. Arthur said the young man told him they were closing the museum early on account of it being such a rainy, miserable day—nobody wanting to see the collection, well, no tourists, so Arthur must clear off. They weren't nasty about it, just asked him to help them by leaving a bit before time."

"And Arthur duly toddled off," Professor Konnor suggested, a shade grimly. "That museum is a joke." Fitting a cigarette into an ivory holder, he was casual enough but listening hard.

"After breakfast this morning—" Mrs. Withypool gulped and started again. "Arthur was helping with the washing-up, always does, he's such a *good* boy. Then there was banging at the door. I dropped a plate—visitors that early. It was the police. They said Arthur had stolen coins from the Town Museum and he needn't deny it, they knew he had."

Frowning, Konnor prompted, "So, what next?"

The handkerchief was a sodden rag Ada Withypool twisted distractedly. "They made him turn out his pockets and then they went

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through the house. Tidy-like, you know, not rough, but it was awful, sir."

"Did they have a search warrant?"

She looked at him blankly, almost impatiently. "We said they could, there'd be nothing wrongful for them to find! Nor there was. Arthur never stole nothing in his life, never—not even pennies or jelly babies or another kiddie's toy at nursery school when he was tiny. There's no theft in that boy." Ada Withypool was oddly proud and defiant. Professor Konnor, recalling that she was a widow and had been for more than a decade, wondered whether Arthur's dead father had been light-fingered, hence her anxiety with its strange undercurrent of relief over her son's transparent honesty.

But the woeful voice was flowing on. "There was nothing to find because Arthur never took nothing. But they made him go with them, they've taken him away!" She trailed off, for Professor Konnor was strolling into his bedroom. "Sir?"

He returned, shrugging into an extravagantly baggy leather jerkin, soft as butter and much the same color. "Make yourself a cup of tea, Mrs. Withypool, then go home. I can endure a measure of squalor for twenty-four hours. I'll look after Arthur." He smiled briefly. "The whole thing is palpable nonsense. Just a matter of persuading P.C. Plod of that salient fact."

Konnor made the Porsche growl and snarl, drove into Police Headquarters with a flourish, and parked in the slot reserved for the Chief Constable. Professor Konnor happened to know that the man was on holiday. Otherwise he would have left the car in any space where parking was nominally forbidden.

No lawbreaker—that the authorities knew of, anyhow—Konnor was on good terms with the town's force. He was called on as consultant from time to time, when human skeletons were uncovered on building sites, for instance. ("Your pathologist will tell you it was murder, boys, but don't get too excited. By now the suspect will be around a thousand years old.") Therefore there was little delay in gaining Detective Superintendent George Greatly's office. Greatly, with cropped ginger hair and matching, stubby moustache, was a hard-worn and hard-wearing kind of man, who grinned at sight of his visitor. "Want a parking ticket fixed?" he jeered.

Konnor sat down, used his silver cigarette case, and said, "Arthur Withypool."

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The policeman waited without result before asking amiably, "Some intellectual game, is it? I guess who he is or whatever?"

"I assumed you knew, having arrested him this morning."

Greatly's gaze flickered. "Never assume," he advised drily. "I've never heard of your Mr. Withypool. What's he supposed to have done?"

"Supposed is the operative word." Konnor lit the cigarette. "Arthur's supposed to have stolen items from the Town Museum. Coins, to be precise."

Superintendent Greatly, smile returning, said, "Ah, that explains it. Wrong shop, chum. Petty crime, sounds like—not my parish. Dare say the wooden-tops—" he coughed and corrected himself "—the uniformed lads are handling it. Hang about, we'll see." He keyed his intercom and when it quacked replied, "Ask Inspector Potts to step up."

While they waited, Professor Konnor retold the story as Arthur's mother had given it. Superintendent Greatly, who had visited one of Konnor's excavations the previous summer, remembered Arthur Withypool. "I'd have said the kid wouldn't say boo to a goose. Right little swot, permanent-student type. But then a lot of thieves are meek and mild."

"He's not a thief," Konnor claimed, patiently enough. "That is why I am here, you dolt."

"Compliments pass when the gentry meet," Greatly responded, unruffled. Putting on a straight face, sitting up in his chair, he jerked his chin at the office door as it swung open.

Though Inspector Potts's uniform was pristine, creased only where it was supposed to be, he had an aura of living within it. His wary glance demanded to know who the intruder might be. George Greatly ignored the unspoken question. "Just mark my card on a certain Arthur Withypool, Tommy."

Professor Konnor wanted to smirk. Potts's prim mouth, long nose, and general demeanor of butch male governess did not belong to Tommy or Tom, but Thomas or nothing. Inspector Potts, chin tucked in, muttered, "Oh, the yobbo who nicked the old coins down the museum. Got him downstairs. No sweat."

Still genial, the Superintendent said, "This is Professor Konnor from the University. He knows Withypool. I'm by way of respecting the Professor's opinions and he thinks there may be, um, some perspiration over this."

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Potts inspected Konnor, making little secret of his lack of awe. "You know the boy," he repeated flatly but meaningly.

Konnor kept his tone level. "His mother works for me, and Arthur Withypool is a young man of high integrity. I will be recommending him for a scholarship to Wessex University." He looked straight back at Potts, who wilted within seconds, moistened his lips, and said weakly, "Oh, I see, sir. No offense meant."

"But some taken," Konnor commented. "Arthur isn't a yobbo, Mr. Potts. And even with yobbos, don't we bother to get search warrants any more, before ransacking their homes?"

Inspector Potts spoke directly to George Greatly. "His Mum *wanted* us to check, practically *made* us look around."

The Superintendent addressed his clasped hands. "A smart lawyer will love that, Tommy. You know how the local paper's been on our backs lately. I can see it: blameless youth, only son of his mother and her a widow. And we barge in, giving her humble cottage a turn-over."

Potts emerged as stubborn if not staunch under attack. "Clear-cut business, sir—the lad nicked that stuff. Withypool had been left alone in the part of the museum where the coins were on display. The cases were fine when he went in. After he'd gone and they started closing for the day, they discovered one of the displays broken open and valuable Saxon-period coins missing. As it happened, Arthur Withypool was the only outsider to be in the museum yesterday afternoon. We found a notebook on his person this morning, dated yesterday and with four pages full of details of the very coins that are missing."

Checking himself—evidently Inspector Potts considered himself fair-minded—he amended, "Which means all the stolen coins are noted down in that book, and more besides. The kid was drooling over the bloody things all afternoon and finally nicked the cream of 'em."

Professor Konnor regarded him with insulting wonder. "You really *do* draw that conclusion from Arthur's notebook," he murmured. "Remarkable."

Superintendent Greatly's phone erupted. He snatched it and said, "Yeah, right away, he'll be on it." Hanging up, he announced, "Four-vehicle crash on the College Road, Tommy. One's on fire and it's certainly a fatal, maybe more than one dead. Better get cracking—take charge and do your thing, eh?"

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Potts hastened out, body language eloquent with relief at escaping.

Professor Konnor shook his head. "Arthur was in the museum for half an hour at most, George, during which period he's supposed to have made four pages of notes—with him, they'll be tediously copious at that—*and* stolen a number of coins."

Greatly pointed out, "He could have made those notes last week, last year—anyone can stick a current date on old material. But you're in order, chum, something stinks." He frowned. "I shouldn't have given ol' Potts a rucking in front of a civilian. He's a good chap, straight as straight, but—well, limited."

"Meanwhile," Konnor said coldly, "Arthur is limited to a cell."

"He's in an interview room, as well you know, with a pretty little woman police constable to get him a nice cuppa char and a bun if he plays his cards right," the Superintendent scoffed. Before the professor could rise to the bait, Greatly went on, "I know, the boy's future could go down the drain if we wrongly brand him a thief—a museum thief, of all things. So long to his job with you, for a start, am I right?" Konnor nodded, his eyes bleak. "So let's stroll over College Green and take a look at the museum," Greatly proposed. "Can't say fairer nor that, old chum."

The Town Museum and County Library shared a wing of the lower floor of the town council offices, a Victorian building which Professor Konnor had won few local friends by describing as miscegenation between Gothic public baths and a castle on the Rhine. The library was a large and very good one, the museum smaller, much less good. Mr. Abbots, chief librarian, doubled as museum curator.

Mr. Abbots was pear-shaped. Like the museum, there was no harm in him. When Superintendent Greatly and Professor Konnor came in, the pear trundled toward them between ranks of sloping, glass-lidded cases.

"Professor Konnor, how good of you—" Mr. Abbots sounded sincere though dubious. He knew that Konnor deprecated the Town Museum, for sound motives. Unable to do anything about that, Abbots certainly could be hurt and resentful. "You've heard about our trouble. Disgraceful, young people nowadays—Vandals and Visigoths and Huns reincarnated, mindless destruction as a way of life."

Konnor cut in ruthlessly. "I've brought Detective Superintendent Greatly to sort this thing out, Mr. Abbots."

Blinking through his bifocals, the librarian-curator became smug.

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"Ah, but everything is under control, the culprit has been found." Smugness eroded as he admitted, "Our exhibits have not been, more's the pity."

George Greatly said, "A young man is helping us with our investigation at this time, sir. He is not the culprit, as you put it, and even if we charge him he will be no more than a suspect until the court has had its say." He had the grace to look sheepish at such stuffiness when Konnor rolled an eye his way.

Missing the point (he wasn't much good at listening, Professor Konnor concluded), Abbots was helpful. "Oh, there's no doubt it was the work of that young Arthur Withypool. No doubt, more's the pity. I thought better of Arthur, upon my soul I did." He beamed at Konnor. "Your protege, was he not?"

"He is," Konnor corrected. "What he is not is a thief."

Abbots pushed the spectacles up the modest bridge of his nose. "Oh dear, you haven't heard why it *must* have been Withypool. Keith will explain—my assistant, Keith Bishop."

He appeared to be making an introductory wave at thin air, and then Mr. Bishop—spruce, sallow, an elderly young man with greased-back dark hair—stepped into view from behind a range of cupboards. His eyes sparkled. "Never had the pleasure before, Professor Konnor. Your book on the Norse occupation of Corsica, I cut my teeth on that—grew up with it at the Tech, you could say. Terrific book. Mind, I can't agree with some of your conclusions, but—"

He found himself talking to the professor's back. "I'm disturbed to hear that," Konnor acknowledged, voice muffled as he leaned over a case. "George, look at this. It has points of interest."

"Solid bit of work," the Superintendent commented. He touched the heavy mahogany framing around the cracked glass of its lid. Wood around the lock was splintered. "Took some force to do that."

"And a suitable tool. Inspector Potts didn't mention finding anything like that at Arthur's home—not for want of trying, I dare say."

"Tommy would have mentioned finding it," Greatly agreed. "By the same token, it's the first thing a robber would sling away, Professor."

Konnor had drifted to another case. Passing it, he stopped and swooped, nose to the glass, fingers white with pressure as he grasped the sides. "Good heavens—*not* the usual museum variety, pin through the thorax. Not so, but contrariwise—we fly we flutter, where no flowers bloom." The others smiled uneasily. Konnor

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straightened and turned suddenly. "When was this case last opened?" he demanded sharply.

Mr. Abbots floundered. Mr. Bishop prompted him in a whisper and Abbots replied, "Some two years ago. We have no reason to open them more frequently, they are airtight and keep the dust at bay." Waxing plaintive and a hint patronizing, he added, "I hardly need state the obvious to *you,* Professor—the coins in that case are of the Roman period, none are missing."

Lips trembling with amusement at the corners, Keith Bishop confirmed, "It's the Saxon coins that kid snatched, Professor. Those are Roman."

Konnor nodded at Greatly. "Roman coins in this case, George—no fooling these chaps. Listen to them, you'll learn a thing or two." He was enjoying himself. Beckoning them closer, he repeated, "Last opened two years ago. *So how do you account for that?*"

The four men stared down at the butterfly, patently alive, gaudy wings battering at the glass enclosing it. Alerted by movement and shadows, it was frantic to get out.

"It will dirty the backing cards!" Abbots exclaimed. "Excuse me, the keys—I must fetch the keys!"

As his boss trotted away, Keith Bishop muttered, "Not only the butterfly getting into a flap." Sobering, he jerked a thumb at the damaged display case. "That's the one our Arthur broke open, you know."

Greatly said, "We know all about that, son. The thing is, this butterfly got in here, meaning—"

"That the case has been opened recently. It didn't hatch out in there, the case is clean and tidy, and there is no sign of a chrysalis," Professor Konnor explained. Humming under his breath, he mused over a NO SMOKING sign, fitted a cigarette into the ivory holder, and inhaled, then dragon-exhaled through his nostrils relishingly.

Mr. Abbots was so mortified he didn't notice the anarchy. Fitting the key at the third nervous attempt, he motioned to Keith Bishop to raise the lid. The butterfly, a Red Admiral, ascended drunkenly, an outside scrap of confetti falling against gravity. Konnor caught it deftly in cupped palms, to be released unharmed through the sash window Superintendent Greatly opened for him.

When they all turned back from the window, Abbots fussing to ensure that it was relocked, Professor Konnor had propped the case's lid open and was poring over its display. "Abbots, sorry to be a pain, but these coins aren't in chronological order."

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"Really? I set them out myself." Abbots colored, craning over the ranks of coinage. "Upon my soul, you're right! First that blessed insect where it shouldn't be, and now somebody's played silly-devils with these! Second and Third Century emperors all mixed up—"

Superintendent Greatly pushed in. "Let the dog see the rabbit, gentlemen. Professor, I don't know Second Century from the second division of the Football League but I've been looking for stolen property all my working life and I can spot a stash a mile off."

"Yes," Konnor assented dreamily, "*I* find it odd that the upper rows of coins are perfectly flush with the display base, exactly fitting the depressions, but these other ones are well above the surface, several lying a bit askew."

As Mr. Abbots goggled at them, Keith Bishop nagged, "It was the *Saxon* coins that went, these are Roman!"

"Shut up," the policeman ordered, not unkindly, "and let me get on with my job." Stubby fingers pincering, he lifted a Roman coin from its circular nest.

"Presto," Professor Konnor purred, while Mr. Abbots exclaimed a surprisingly rude word for such a pinkly proper old gentleman. For a coin remained in the circular recess—smaller, thinner, dull silver.

"I think," Konnor said, "we've found your missing items. George, let's have the rest out."

Before Greatly could comply, Keith Bishop cocked his head and groaned. "There goes the damned phone in your office, Mr. Abbots. Always the way, just when things get interesting. I'll be right ba—" The word skidded off into an anguished squeal. Professor Konnor was urging Mr. Bishop to remain, by means of thumb-imposed pressure between shoulder and collarbone.

As Bishop sank to one knee, Konnor said, "You have access to the key of this case. You sent Arthur Withypool out of here early yesterday afternoon in order to smash one case, have time to hide the loot in plain sight, and still 'discover' the theft at the museum's real closing hour. You're not a good man, Bishop. Bit of a failure as a human being."

"Make him let me go," wailed Keith Bishop. Konnor removed his fingers and, rather unkindly, made a show of wiping them on another of those snowy handkerchieves. Superintendent Greatly, blending a minim of genuine compassion with a great deal of tradesman's joviality, helped Bishop to his feet.

"Why'd you do it, son? Slow horses, fast women, fiddling the

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books?" Keith Bishop's mouth worked. "I want a lawyer, I know my rights." And he burst into tears.

Later the same day, Greatly and Konnor were sipping real ale from the tap in the campus pub at Wessex University. Superintendent Greatly cleared his throat and remarked, with what in another man might have been diffidence, "Arthur Withypool would never have been convicted, Professor. Not with his clean record, and the stolen coins missing, no direct link to him."

"But he might have been tried—and mud sticks." Konnor grimaced, not entirely from the tang of his drink. "Never mind, George, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds and our police are wonderful. There, I've said it."

"Very droll, very satirical. And it's still your turn to buy a round." Greatly lifted his refilled tankard in mute toast. "The council won't prosecute Keith Bishop. Just as well in a way. The coins hadn't yet been taken from the premises, just misplaced to deceive. Messy thing to prosecute. But he's lost his job—punishment enough with better than three million out of work, wouldn't you say?"

Konnor, lovingly adjusting his silk cravat, conceded. "You heard him daring to question my Corsica theories? I predict the next digging he does will be on some building site, *not* an archaeological excavation."

The policeman, covertly tickled by the flash of abraded vanity, teased, "Right Sherlock you turned out to be, Professor."

Nigel Konnor took the taunt gracefully. "A deerstalker does rather suit me, actually. And when I write my memoirs, there'll be no problem over a title for this little episode. 'The Butterfly Case.' "

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a ***NEW*** **short story by**

DONALD OLSON

Perhaps because of his singularly uneventful life, Walter had created an image of himself as the very dullest of fellows, while in that secret life we all pursue he had forever dreamed of Something Happening, something to jar him out of that spiritual void in which the colorless non-events of his life had trapped him . . .

LONG SHOT ON A STONE ANGEL

by DONALD OLSON

On his first visit, Walter Kress had approached the Glade County Correctional Facility with no less trembling agitation than if he had been a convicted felon doomed to remain behind its dun-colored walls for an infinitely longer period than the actual hour he was permitted to stay as a visitor. On this third visit, the procedure for admittance, while no less disturbing to the tender sensibilities of so gentle a creature as Walter Kress, was too familiar to be alarming. He answered the obligatory questions, submitted to the electronic scanning of his person, and entered the long narrow visitors' room with only a mild fluttering of the heart.

Helmann was already seated on the opposite side of the low metal partition, cowlicky blond hair, frank blue eyes, and wide, softly contoured lips creating a deceptively youthful impression despite the grey-tinged gauntness of confinement. He greeted Walter with a look of mute expectancy devoid of any real hope. The look disconcerted Walter. He tried to strengthen the weakness of his smile but with an equally false heartiness of manner.

"I left a carton of smokes for you with the guard, and some candy

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bars. You're looking better, Miner," he lied. "Did they give you something for the headaches?"

"Finally, yes. Your prodding must have helped. Did you do what you said you were going to?"

"Talk to your lawyer? Yes. He even let me read the trial transcript. Miner, I think he did the best he could under the circumstances."

"Oh, sure. Probably couldn't have done better even if he had believed me. I suppose you don't, either, now you've read the official record of the—circumstances."

"I do believe you're innocent, Miner. *You* must believe that."

Walter's conviction of Helmann's innocence was inspired by something more powerful than intuition—by an extraordinary empathy stronger than any force of logic or reason, a conviction born during that first visit a month earlier. Until then Walter had never heard of Miner Helmann. A distaste for even the news of violence and crime had left him ignorant of Steffi Helmann's murder and her husband's subsequent trial and sentencing.

A most unlikely sequence of events had led to their meeting. Forced into an early retirement at sixty by the sale of the company he'd worked for most of his life, Walter had cast about for some activity to fill the empty, endless hours. He enjoyed no hobbies, no intellectual or sporting interests, and there wasn't enough to do around the little house he shared with his wife Berenice to consume his time. Perhaps because of his singularly uneventful life, Walter had created an image of himself as the very dullest of fellows, while in that secret life we all pursue he had forever dreamed of Something Happening, something to jar him out of that spiritual void in which the colorless non-events of his life had trapped him.

Having achieved nothing he could look back upon with any real depth of satisfaction, he hadn't expected any doors to open at this late stage of his life—certainly not prison doors. It was Father Wyckham who had broached the idea of enrolling Walter in his newly organized Prison Visitor Program. At first Walter had rejected the idea, but the priest persisted until Walter agreed to give it a try. He was assigned to Miner Helmann, one of those prisoners in Glade with neither friends nor relatives to visit them, and there was something about the man's personality, some air of wounded dignity and quiet despair, to which Walter had responded with that purely instinctive faith in the man's innocence.

The outrage Walter expressed more vigorously after every visit to Glade left Berenice Kress faintly amused and disapproving. Her

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simple-minded, conventional acceptance of the legal system's intrinsic wisdom obliged her to regard Walter's attitude as a rather endearing aberration of his usual good sense, something to be humored but not taken seriously, to be treated as no more than a rather peculiar hobby.

"Walt, you hardly know the man. If he didn't kill his wife, why is he in jail?"

"The case was based entirely on circumstantial evidence, Bunny. I told you. Miner suspected his wife was carrying on with another man. One day he parked his car behind the apartment complex hoping to surprise them together, to discover who the man was. If he'd been there, the man was gone by the time Miner burst in. He and his wife had a flaming row. He admits he hit her, something he'd never done before. He stormed out and went for a long walk to cool off—all the way to Lakeview Cemetery. He told me he often went there, away from everybody, when he was really upset about anything. He'd sit on a stone bench near his parents' graves and sort of silently commune with them, you know. Pour out his grievances. Sounds odd, I suppose, you'd have to know him to understand. There's something trustingly naive about the fellow.

"Anyway, he happened to meet this woman in the cemetery. Unfortunately, he never found out her name or anything about her. Somehow they got to talking and he found himself spilling out all his troubles, the way you sometimes feel free to do with total strangers. When it began to rain and she found out he hadn't driven there, this woman offered him a lift.

"He still dreaded the thought of facing his wife and he asked the woman to drive him down to the marina where he and his wife owned a boat jointly with another couple. When they got there, he asked her aboard for coffee and—well, they ended up going to bed together. He swore he'd never been unfaithful to his wife before, but it just happened, he was in such a mood. Afterward he fell asleep. She was gone when he woke up.

"He walked all the way back to the apartment and found his wife dead, her head battered in. Her blood was on his clothes, he admitted they'd had a row, but he had an alibi. Or thought he did. Oh, sure, the cops went through the motions of trying to verify his story about the woman in the cemetery but she never came forward. Miner couldn't prove his wife had a lover, who is most likely the one who killed her, and that was the end of it. They simply didn't believe his story. Nor did the jury."

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Nor did Berenice. "Honestly, Walt, you're so gullible. It didn't sound fishy to you? What sort of woman would pick up a stranger—in a cemetery, of all places—and go on some boat with him and— And if he was so madly in love with his wife, why would he make love with some woman he'd never set eyes on before?"

"Bunny, if he were guilty why would he *admit* he'd made love to her? He might have known the jury would react just like you."

Father Wyckham disapproved even more strongly than Berenice of Walter's attitude. The first thing he'd warned Walter about was the danger of becoming emotionally too close to a prisoner. That wasn't the purpose of the Visitor Program. Neither of them fully understood the intensity of Walter's developing obsession with Helmann's innocence. He found it impossible to explain. It was doubtful Helmann himself understood it although he was touchingly grateful.

"Look, Walter, I know you want to help, but you can't. No one can. Only that woman."

"And you think her reason for keeping quiet was because she didn't want to compromise herself."

"Can you blame her? When she read about the case, she was probably scared stiff."

Walter replied tartly that that was no excuse for sitting back and letting an innocent man go to jail—which earned from Helmann a despairing, lopsided grin. "Too bad you weren't my lawyer, Walter."

"Or a detective with more on the ball than those police chappies. Think, Miner. You were with that woman for hours. She must have said *something* that would give us a clue to her identity."

"I'm afraid I did most of the talking," Helmann said ruefully.

"Okay, let's start at the cemetery. She must have been there to visit a relative's grave, or a friend's. Didn't she say?"

"If she did, I can't remember. What we said to each other was just small talk, the way strangers talk when they find themselves alone together in a place like that."

"What *sort* of small talk?"

"Oh, God, Walter, who remembers? We talked about what a beautiful place it was, so quiet and peaceful, lovely old trees. I said our plot didn't have any trees and how my folks loved them and so I'd had a red oak planted on their graves. I remember she sort of laughed and said her grandmother had always wanted more than anything else a stone angel for a monument. Then it started to rain and I said something about nice talking with her and she asked where I'd parked, and when I said I'd walked she sort of thought for a minute,

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as if she wasn't sure she ought to, and then she asked me if I wanted a lift. You know the rest. Why keep going over it?"

Walter hunched forward with sudden, rising excitement. "The stone angel. You told the police that?"

Helmann returned his gaze blankly. "No. Why should I?" Then it dawned on him. "Oh, come on, Walter. Stop dreaming. That's a big cemetery. There must be dozens of stone angels. I'm pretty sure she just said her grandmother always *wanted* a stone angel for a monument, not that she had one. And even if it exists, it might be in—who knows? Texas, California—"

"Or right there in Lakeview Cemetery! Miner, it's something to go on! A long shot, sure, but even if there are a dozen stone angels there I could find them all. Check out the names on the gravestones. Look up old obituaries. Find out the names of grandchildren—"

"Walter, it's crazy. You'd be wasting your time."

Walter was already on his feet. "Time, Miner, is all I've got."

There was something else he wanted to do first. Helmann having given his permission, his lawyer agreed to intrust Walter with the key to Helmann's apartment—while making no secret of his disapproval. "Your intentions are admirable, Mr. Kress, but you're not doing Helmann any good. The case is closed. There are simply no viable grounds for further appeal. Helmann understands that. And it's absurd to think you'll find anything at the apartment the police overlooked."

Walter said nothing about the stone angel—he knew with what scorn the lawyer would have dismissed that seemingly hopeless lead. Nor did he expect to find any clues overlooked by the police. What he was looking for were clues to a man's character, reflections of his personality. He wanted to be able to visualize Miner Helmann in a more natural setting than the visitors' room at Glade. He felt a compulsion to discover all he could about this man who had so deeply stirred his consciousness.

The apartment complex stood surrounded by parkland on the edge of the city. Helmann's third-floor apartment was oppressively silent, with a faintly musty air of abandonment. Walter had half expected to find a diagram in chalk outlining the position of the corpse, but there was nothing, not even a lingering atmosphere of horror, to indicate this had been the scene of bloody tragedy.

For an hour, he padded softly through the rooms, touching, observing, sensing, imagining in his ears an echo of that lacerating

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quarrel which had marked the final communication between the Helmanns. As expected, he found nothing of consequence that might have been overlooked beyond a single iridescent bead caught in the fringed border of an oriental throw rug in the living room.

Picking it up, he glanced across at a photograph of Helmann and his wife on the mantelpiece. Steffi Helmann had unquestionably been a beautiful woman, but at the same time Walter found something mildly disagreeable in the confidently sensual cast of her features. He pictured the bead as part of a necklace around her throat. The bauble seemed as icily brilliant as those flashing, arrogant eyes. Before leaving, Walter slipped the bead into his pocket as if wishing to carry away some tiny memento of his visit.

"But what are we looking *for?*" complained Berenice. "It's much too nasty a day to be wandering around the cemetery."

"Bunny, I told you. We're looking for stone angels. When we find one, we jot down the information from the tombstone. Simple."

It took just over an hour to traverse the entire cemetery, at the end of which time Walter, with Berenice's reluctant help, had compiled a long list of names and dates transcribed from headstones set beneath stone angels of various sizes and degrees of splendor. The following day found him at the public library poring over old obituaries on microfilm copies of the local newspaper, noting each reference to a female grandchild of the deceased.

Helmann appeared touched, even impressed, but no more encouraging than before. "Even supposing you did by some far-out stroke of luck locate the right woman. So what? She's not going to admit knowing me. Only a fanatic would be as stubborn as you, Walter."

Fanatics, if that's what he had become, have their dreams and Walter had gone too far to relinquish his. "Luck has nothing to do with it," he declared. "It's a matter of logic and persistence and—and faith! You've got to have faith, Miner."

The vigor of Walter's convictions brought a sad smile to Helmann's face. "*Why,* Walter? Why does this mean so much to you?"

The question seemed to astound Walter. "Why? Because I've never done anything, Miner. Do you know what it's like to look back over sixty years and know you've done nothing but occupy space? Never had any purpose in life? Just breathed?"

His determination did not falter as he tackled the even more tiresome job of systematically tracking down the living female

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grandchildren of those buried beneath the stone angels in Lakeview Cemetery. For every lead that proved fruitless, he consoled himself with the knowledge that the possibilities were being narrowed down, never once admitting that eventually all those possibilities might be exhausted with nothing to show for his labors but the folly of a hopeless quest.

There comes a point in such a seemingly futile pursuit as occupied Walter over the next fortnight when a kind of blindness afflicts the sight. A door opens, a face appears. Conditioned to failure, the mind frames an apology even before the stranger's features become impressed upon the eye. So it happened when the door on Gordon Street opened to reveal a tallish, slim woman with faded red hair, heavy-lidded hazel eyes, and a high-bridged, somewhat too prominent nose. Thirty seconds must have passed before the shock of recognition hit Walter and something stronger than a hunch told him this had to be the face of the woman Helmann had so vividly described.

"Madelyn Collier?"

"Yes?"

"My name is Walter Kress. I'm here on behalf of Miner Helmann."

Almost instantly, the woman's features turned as rigid as one of those stone angels, but not quickly enough. That first eye-flash of panic gave her away.

Walter lied with all the confidence of a man with a mission, countering her denials with claims that fingerprints found on Helmann's boat, as yet unidentified by the police, would certainly turn out to be hers, that Miner Helmann's prints would be found on her car, and that witnesses would be found to place her in Helmann's company.

Her tears when they came left him unmoved. The knowledge of the pain her willful silence had brought to another human being destroyed whatever sympathy he might have spared her.

She admitted that Helmann had been right about her reasons for remaining silent. "We'd been having problems for a long time, my husband and I. If he'd found out about Miner Helmann and what happened on that boat, it would have been fatal. It was madness, my going there, I don't know why I did it. The rain, the place we met. And I felt sorry for him. I felt sorry for us both." The tears passed, leaving her resigned, hopeless. "It doesn't matter now. My husband has left me. He's gone—nothing matters any more."

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Only now did Walter's heart soften toward her. "Then will you come with me to Helmann's lawyer?"

She hesitated, as if only now realizing the consequences of her behavior. "I won't have to face him, will I? Miner Helmann, I mean? I really couldn't bear that."

The day after his release from Glade, Miner Helmann invited Walter to dinner at one of the city's finest restaurants. His awkward, stumbling attempt to find words to express his gratitude to Walter left the older man pink with embarrassment. "The look on your face, Miner, that's all the thanks I want. You know, the funny part is that I wasn't lying to Madelyn Collier, after all. As it turned out, the police did find her fingerprints on your boat, and yours in her car. Have you seen her?"

"I phoned. She feels awful, of course, but she refused to see me. I told her I wasn't holding a grudge, that I understood what it's like to love someone and not want to lose them. She said she wanted to try to forget the whole thing."

"So must you, Miner. It's over. Ended."

Helmann's face clouded. "Is it? There'll always be those who'll believe I killed Steffi. The guy who murdered her is still out there somewhere. I was lying, you know, when I said it would be impossible for me to kill anyone. I loved my wife, Walter, more than you can imagine, in spite of everything. I could kill whoever murdered her. I mean that seriously."

"In that case, Miner, I hope the man is never found."

As they were preparing to leave the restaurant, Walter stuck his hand in his pocket, vainly insisting that Helmann let him share the bill. His fingers touched something cool and hard. Frowning, he drew out the iridescent glass bead he'd picked up in Helmann's apartment. Before he could conceal what it was, Helmann had seen it.

"What's that you've got?" he asked.

Sheepishly, Walter handed it across to him. Under the light, the bead glittered coldly in Helmann's palm. Walter told him where he'd found it, hating himself for having unwittingly produced the tiny reminder of the man's loss. He tried to apologize but Helmann only shook his head. "Forget it, Walter," he said. "It doesn't matter now."

Two days later, when Walter came downstairs for breakfast, he

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found Berenice holding the morning paper. Silently, with a stricken look, she held it out to him. He read the headline:

SUICIDE OF RELUCTANT WITNESS IN MURDER CASE

Without phoning first, Walter drove straight to Helmann's apartment. "Miner, have you heard?"

Helmann nodded, his pallor recalling to Walter the way his face had looked in prison. "It's all my fault," said Walter. "I as well as killed her, poor thing. Losing her husband and then having to confess what she'd done to you. It must have been too much for her. Sleeping pills, it said."

Helmann motioned him into the living room. "If anyone's to blame it's me, not you."

"You didn't find her and force her to come forward, I did."

Something in Helmann's manner as he sat down facing Walter filled the older man with uneasiness. "It wasn't because you found her that she killed herself, Walter, but you've a right to know the truth. I just wish you'd never given me that damned bead."

"Bead? What's that got to do with it?"

"I recognized it the minute you took it out of your pocket. It was part of a necklace, but not my wife's. Madelyn Collier was wearing it the day I met her. I went to see her yesterday. I had to, Walter. I had to know. There was only one way it could have got in my apartment. I told her she could either tell me the truth, or the police.

"She broke down. She was a very unstable woman, you know. It all came out. She'd found out her husband was having an affair with Steffi. She'd followed them several times. She was in her car outside our apartment house that day, screwing up her courage to face Steffi. She knew I was Steffi's husband, she'd seen us together. When she saw me leave the building alone, she decided to follow me, intending to tell me everything. Something made her change her mind there in the cemetery. She said—yesterday she said she felt sorry for me.

"She carried her sleeping pills in her bag. After we'd made love on the boat, she put a couple in my coffee. When I was asleep, she drove to the apartment. She claimed she went to try to reason with Steffi. Steffi became abusive, said she was leaving me and running away with Collier. They struggled—that's when Madelyn's necklace broke. She seized a bronze bookend and struck Steffi over the head—and kept battering her until she was dead. Then she wiped the bookend clean and thought she'd retrieved all the beads from her necklace before she fled, apparently without anyone having seen her arrive or leave."

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For moments after Helmann stopped talking, Walter could only stare at him. Finally he said, "You told the police, of course."

"No."

"For God's sake, why not?"

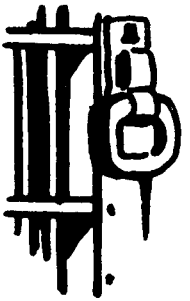
"You have to ask? They would never believe I didn't kill Madelyn, that I didn't force her to swallow those pills."

"But why shouldn't they believe you?"

"Did they believe I hadn't killed Steffi? No, Walter, I couldn't take that risk." He leaned forward, resting his hand on Walter's arm, searching his eyes with a look of urgent entreaty. "I had to tell you, Walter. You're probably the only person in the world who would believe me. Sometimes I get the feeling you know me better than I know myself. You do believe me, don't you, Walter?"

Not for Helmann's sake, but for his own, Walter knew there was only one answer he could give, regardless of that mysterious instinct which gave him pause. In terms of the human connection, the man facing him represented perhaps the only meaningful investment of the spirit Walter Kress had ever made, or ever would make.

"Yes," he replied gravely. "Yes, Miner, I believe you."



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a Horace Rumpole story by

JOHN MORTIMER

Young Erskine-Brown, who wore striped shirts and what Rumpole believed were known as Chelsea Boots, was turning up his well bred nose at a job at Lambeth Rumpole would have bought Albert a double claret in Pommeroy's for at his age and saying he was sick to death of crime.

Rumpole had very little patience with Erskine-Brown. "A person who is tired of crime," he told him, "is tired of life."

"Rumpole and the Younger Generation" was John Mortimer's first Rumpole story and leads off the collection of thirteen in The First Rumpole Omnibus *(Penguin, 1983). We concur with the* London Sunday Times' *estimate of Horace Rumpole as "a fruity, foxy masterpiece, defender of our wilting faith in mankind . . ."*

RUMPOLE AND THE YOUNGER GENERATION

by JOHN MORTIMER

I, Horace Rumpole, barrister at law, sixty-eight next birthday, Old Bailey Hack, husband to Mrs. Hilda Rumpole (known to me only as She Who Must Be Obeyed) and father to Nicholas Rumpole (lecturer in social studies at the University of Baltimore, I have always been extremely proud of Nick); I, who have a mind full of old murders, legal anecdotes, and memorable fragments of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* (Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's edition) together with a dependable knowledge of bloodstains, blood groups, fingerprints, and forgery by typewriter; I, who am now the oldest member of my Chambers, take up my pen at this advanced age

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during a lull in business (there's not much crime about, all the best villains seem to be off on holiday in the Costa Brava), in order to write my reconstructions of some of my recent triumphs (including a number of recent disasters) in the Courts of Law, hoping thereby to turn a bob or two which won't be immediately grabbed by the taxman, or my clerk Henry, or by She Who Must Be Obeyed, and perhaps give some sort of entertainment to those who, like myself, have found in British justice a life-long subject of harmless fun.

When I first considered putting pen to paper in this matter of my life, I thought I must begin with the great cases of my comparative youth, the "Penge Bungalow Murder," where I gained an acquittal alone and without a leader, or the "Great Brighton Benefit Club Forgery," which I contrived to win by reason of my exhaustive study of typewriters. In these cases I was, for a brief moment, in the Public Eye, or at least my name seemed almost a permanent feature of the *News of the World,* but when I come to look back on that period of my life at the Bar it all seems to have happened to another Rumpole, an eager young barrister whom I can scarcely recognize and whom I am not at all sure I would like, at least not enough to spend a whole book with him.

I am not a public figure now, so much has to be admitted; but some of the cases I shall describe, the wretched business of the Honourable Member, for instance, or the charge of murder brought against the youngest, and barmiest, of the appalling Delgardo brothers, did put me back on the front page of the *News of the World* (and even got me a few inches in *The Times*). But I suppose I have become pretty well known, if not something of a legend, round the Old Bailey, in Pommeroy's Wine Bar in Fleet Street, in the robing room at London Sessions, and in the cells at Brixton Prison. They know me there for never pleading guilty, for chain-smoking small cigars, and for quoting Wordsworth when they least expect it. Such notoriety will not long survive my not-to-be-delayed trip to Golders Green Crematorium. Barristers' speeches vanish quicker than Chinese dinners, and even the greatest victory in Court rarely survives longer than the next Sunday's papers.

To understand the full effect on my family life, however, of that case which I have called "Rumpole and the Younger Generation," it is necessary to know a little of my past and the long years that led up to my successful defense of Jim Timson, the sixteen-year-old sprig, the young hopeful, and apple of the eye of the Timsons, a huge

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and industrious family of South London villains. As this case was, by and large, a family matter, it is important that you should understand my family.

My father, the Reverend Wilfred Rumpole, was a Church of England clergyman who, in early middle age, came reluctantly to the conclusion that he no longer believed any one of the 39 Articles. As he was not fitted by character or training for any other profession, however, he had to soldier on in his living in Croydon and by a good deal of scraping and saving he was able to send me as a boarder to a minor public school on the Norfolk coast. I later went to Keble College, Oxford, where I achieved a dubious third in law—you will discover during the course of these memoirs that, although I only feel truly alive and happy in Law Courts, I have a singular distaste for the law. My father's example, and the number of theological students I met at Keble, gave me an early mistrust of clergymen, whom I have always found to be most unsatisfactory witnesses. If you call a clergyman in mitigation, the old darling can be guaranteed to add at least a year to the sentence.

When I first went to the Bar, I entered the Chambers of C. H. Wystan. Wystan had a moderate practice, acquired rather by industry than talent, and a strong disinclination to look at the photographs in murder cases, being particularly squeamish on the fascinating subject of blood. He also had a daughter, Hilda Wystan as was, now Mrs. Hilda Rumpole and She Who Must Be Obeyed. I was ambitious in those days. I did my best to cultivate Wystan's clerk Albert, and I started to get a good deal of criminal work. I did what was expected of me and spent happy hours round the Bailey and Sessions and my fame grew in criminal circles. At the end of the day I would take Albert for a drink in Pommeroy's Wine Bar. We got on extremely well and he would always recommend "his Mr. Rumpole" if a solicitor rang up with a particularly tricky indecent assault or a nasty case of receiving stolen property.

There is no point in writing your memoirs unless you are prepared to be completely candid, and I must confess that, in the course of a long life, I have been in love on several occasions. I am sure that I loved Miss Porter, the shy and nervous but at times liberated daughter of Septimus Porter, my Oxford tutor in Roman Law. In fact, we were engaged to be married, but the engagement had to be broken off because of Miss Porter's early death. I often think about her, and of the different course my home life might have taken, for Miss

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Porter was in no way a girl born to command, or expect, implicit obedience.

During my service with the ground staff of the R.A.F. I undoubtedly became helplessly smitten with the charms of an extremely warmhearted and gallant officer in the W.A.A.F.s by the name of Miss Bobby O'Keefe, but I was no match for the wings of a Pilot Officer, as appeared on the chest of a certain Sam "Three-Fingers" Dogherty. During my conduct of a case, which I shall describe in a later chapter which I have called "Rumpole and the Alternative Society," I once again felt a hopeless and almost feverish stirring of passion for a young woman who was determined to talk her way into Holloway Prison. My relationship with Hilda Wystan was rather different.

To begin with, she seemed part of life in Chambers. She was always interested in the law and ambitious, first for her widowed father, and then, when he proved himself unlikely Lord Chancellor material, for me. She often dropped in for tea on her way home from shopping, and Wystan used to invite me in for a cup.

One year I was detailed off to be her partner at an Inns of Court ball. There it became clear to me that I was expected to marry Hilda; it seemed a step in my career like getting a brief in the Court of Appeal, or doing a murder. When she proposed to me, as she did over a glass of claret cup after an energetic waltz, Hilda made it clear that, when old Wystan finally retired, she expected to see me Head of Chambers. I, who have never felt at a loss for a word in Court, found absolutely nothing to say. In that silence the matter was concluded.

So now you must picture Hilda and me twenty-five years later, with a son at that same east-coast public school which I just managed to afford from the fruits of crime, in our matrimonial home at 25B Froxbury Court, Gloucester Road. (A mansion flat is a misleading description of that cavernous and underheated area which Hilda devotes so much of her energy to keeping shipshape, not to say Bristol fashion.) We were having breakfast, and, between bites of toast, I was reading my brief for that day, an Old Bailey trial of the sixteen-year-old Jim Timson charged with robbery with violence, he having allegedly taken part in a wage snatch on a couple of elderly butchers: an escapade planned in the playground of the local Comprehensive. As so often happens, the poet Wordsworth, that old sheep of the Lake District, sprang immediately to mind, and I gave tongue

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to his lines, well knowing that they must only serve to irritate She Who Must Be Obeyed.

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come From God, who is our home; Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"

I looked at Hilda. She was impassively demolishing a boiled egg. I also noticed that she was wearing a hat, as if prepared to set out upon some expedition. I decided to give her a little more Wordsworth, prompted by my reading the story of the boy Timson.

"Shades of the prison house begin to close Upon the growing boy."

Hilda spoke at last.

"Rumpole, you're not talking about your son, I hope. You're never referring to Nick—"

"Shades of the prison house begin to close? Not round our son, of course. Not round Nick. Shades of the public school have grown round him, the thousand-quid-a-year remand home."

Hilda always thought it indelicate to refer to the subject of school fees, as if being at Mulstead were a kind of unsolicited honor for Nick. She became increasingly businesslike.

"He's breaking up this morning."

"Shades of the prison house begin to open up for the holidays."

"Nick has to be met at eleven-fifteen at Liverpool Street and given lunch. When he went back to school you promised him a show. You haven't forgotten?"

Hilda was clearing away the plates rapidly. To tell the truth, I had forgotten the date of Nick's holidays, but I let her assume I had a long-planned treat laid on for him.

"Of course I haven't forgotten. The only show I can offer him is a robbery with violence in Number 2 Court at the Old Bailey. I wish I could lay on a murder. Nick's always so enjoyed my murders."

It was true. On one distant half term, Nick had sat in on the "Peckham Billiard Hall Stabbing" and enjoyed it a great deal more than *Treasure Island.*

"I must fly! Daddy gets so crotchety if anyone's late. And he does love his visits."

Hilda removed my half empty coffee cup.

"Our father which art in Horsham. Give my respects to the old sweetheart."

It had also slipped my mind that old C. H. Wystan was laid up with a dicky ticker in Horsham General Hospital. The hat was, no

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doubt, a clue I should have followed. Hilda usually goes shopping in a headscarf. By now she was at the door and looking disapproving.

" 'Old sweetheart' is hardly how you used to talk of the Head of your Chambers."

"Somehow I can never remember to call the Head of my Chambers 'Daddy.' "

The door was open. Hilda was making a slow and effective exit.

"Tell Nick I'll be back in good time to get his supper."

"Your wish is my command!" I muttered in my best imitation of a slave out of *Chou Chin Chow*. She chose to ignore it.

"And try not to leave the kitchen looking as though it's been hit by a bomb."

"I hear, oh Master of the Blue Horizons." I said this with a little more confidence, as she had by now started off on her errand of mercy, and I added, for good measure, "She Who Must Be Obeyed!"

I had finished my breakfast and was already thinking how much easier life with the Old Bailey judge was than marriage.

Soon after I finished my breakfast with Hilda, and made plans to meet my son at the start of his holidays from school—Fred Timson, star of a dozen Court appearances, was seeing *his* son in the cells under the Old Bailey as the result of a specially arranged visit. I know he brought the boy his best jacket, which his mother had taken specially to the cleaners, and insisted on his putting on a tie. I imagine he told him that they had the best "brief" in the business to defend him, Mr. Rumpole having always done wonders for the Timson family. I know that Fred told young Jim to stand up straight in the witness box and remember to call the judge "my Lord" and not show his ignorance by coming out with any gaffe such as "Your Honor" or "Sir." The world that day was full of fathers showing appropriate and paternal concern.

The robbery with which Jim Timson was charged was an exceedingly simple one. At about 7:00 P.M. one Friday evening, the date being 16 September, the two elder Brixton butchers, Mr. Cadwallader and Mr. Lewis Stein, closed their shop in Bombay Road and walked with their week's takings round the corner to a narrow alleyway known as Green's Passage, where their grey Austin van was parked. When they got to the van they found that the front tires had been deflated. They stooped to inspect the wheels, and as they did so they were attacked by a number of boys, some armed with knives and one flourishing a cricket stump. Luckily, neither of the

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butchers was hurt, but the attaché case containing their money was snatched.

Chief Inspector "Persil" White, the old darling in whose territory this outrage had been committed, arrested Jim Timson. All the other boys got clean away, but no doubt because he came from a family well known, indeed almost embarrassingly familiar, to the Chief Inspector, and because of certain rumors in the school playground, he was charged and put on an identity parade. The butchers totally failed to identify him, but when he was in the Remand Center young Jim, according to the evidence, had boasted to another boy of having "done the butchers."

As I thought about this case on my way to the Temple that morning, it occurred to me that Jim Timson was a year younger than my son, but that he had got a step further than Nick in following his father's profession. I had always hoped Nick would go into the law and, as I say, he seemed to thoroughly enjoy my murders.

In the clerk's room in Chambers, Albert was handing out the work for the day: rather as a trainer sends his string of horses out on the gallops. I looked round the familiar faces. My friend George Frobisher, who is an old sweetheart but an absolutely hopeless advocate (he can't ask for costs without writing down what he's going to say), was being fobbed off with a nuisance at Kingston County Court. Young Erskine-Brown, who wears striped shirts and what I believe are known as Chelsea Boots, was turning up his well bred nose at an indecent assault at Lambeth (a job I'd have bought Albert a double claret in Pommeroy's for at his age) and saying he would prefer a little civil work, adding that he was so sick to death of crime.

I have very little patience with Erskine-Brown.

"A person who is tired of crime," I told him quite candidly, "is tired of life."

"Your Dangerous and Careless at Clerkenwell is on the mantelpiece, Mr. Hoskins," Albert said.

Hoskins is a gloomy fellow with four daughters. He's always lurking about our clerk's room looking for checks. As I've told him often enough, crime doesn't pay, or at any rate not for a very long time.

When a young man called MacLay had asked in vain for a brief, I invited him to take a note for me down at the Old Bailey. At least he'd get a wig on and not spend a miserable day unemployed in Chambers. Our oldest member, Uncle Tom (very few of us remember

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that his name is T. C. Rowley), also asked Albert if there were any briefs for him, not in the least expecting to find one. To my certain knowledge, Uncle Tom hasn't appeared in Court for fifteen years, when he managed to lose an undefended divorce case, but as he lives with a widowed sister, a lady of such reputed ferocity that she makes She Who Must Be Obeyed sound like Mrs. Tiggywinkle, he spends most of his time in Chambers. He looked remarkably well for seventy-eight.

"You aren't actually *expecting* a brief, Uncle Tom, are you?" Erskine-Brown asked. I can't like Erskine-Brown.

"Time was," Uncle Tom started one of his reminiscences of life in our Chambers—"Time was when I had more briefs in my corner of the mantelpiece, Erskine-Brown, than you've seen in the whole of your short career at the Bar. Now—" he was opening a brown envelope "—I only get invitations to insure my life. It's a little late for that."

Albert told me that the robbery was not before 11:30 before Mr. Justice Everglade in Number 1 Court. He also told me who was prosecuting—none other than the tall, elegant figure with the silk handkerchief and gold wristwatch leaning against the mantelpiece and negligently reading a large check from the Director of Public Prosecutions, Guthrie Featherstone, M.P. He removed the silk handkerchief, dabbed the end of his nose and his small moustache, and asked in that voice which comes over so charmingly, saying nothing much about any important topic of the day in *World at One,*

"Agin me, Rumpole? Are you agin me?" He covered a slight yawn with the handkerchief before returning it to his breastpocket. "Just come from an all-night sitting down at the House. I don't suppose your robbery'll be much of a worry."

"Only, possibly, to young Jim Timson," I told him and then gave Albert his orders for the day. "Mrs. Rumpole's gone down to see her father in Horsham."

"How is Wystan? No better, is he?" Uncle Tom sounded as gently pleased as all old men do when they hear news of illness in others.

"Much the same, Uncle Tom, thank you. And Young Nick, my son—"

"Master Nick?" Albert had always been fond of Nick, and looked forward to putting him through his paces when the time came for him to join our stable in Chambers.

"He's breaking up today. So he'll need meeting at Liverpool Street. Then he can watch a bit of the robbery."

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"We're going to have your son in the audience? I'd better be brilliant." Guthrie Featherstone now moved from the fireplace.

"You needn't bother, old darling. It's his dad he comes to see."

"Oh, *touché,* Rumpole! *Distinctement touché!*"

Featherstone talks like that. Then he invited me to walk down to the Bailey with him. Apparently he was still capable of movement and didn't need a stretcher, even after a sleepless night with the Gas Mains Enabling Bill, or whatever it was.

We walked together down Fleet Street and into Ludgate Circus, Featherstone wearing his overcoat with the velvet collar and little round bowler hat, I puffing a small cigar and with my old mac flapping in the wind. I discovered that the gentleman beside me was quietly quizzing me about my career at the Bar.

"You've been at this game a long while, Rumpole," Featherstone announced. I didn't disagree with him, and then he went on. "You never thought of taking silk?"

"Rumpole, Q.C.?" I almost burst out laughing. "Not on your Nelly. Rumpole 'Queer Customer.' That's what they'd be bound to call me."

"I'm sure you could, with your seniority." I had no idea then of exactly what this Featherstone was after. I gave him my view of Q.C.s in general.

"Perhaps, if I played golf with the right judges, or put up for Parliament, they might make me an artificial silk, or at any rate a nylon." It was at that point I realized I had put up a bit of a black. "Sorry, I forgot. You *did* put up for Parliament."

"Yes. You never thought of Rumpole, Q.C.?" Featherstone had apparently taken no offense.

"Never," I told him. "I have the honor to be an Old Bailey Hack! That's quite enough for me."

At which point we turned up into Newgate Street and there it was in all its glory, touched by a hint of early spring sunshine, the Old Bailey, a stately Law Court, decreed by the City Fathers, an Edwardian palace, with an extensive modern extension to deal with the increase in human fallibility. There was the Dome and the Blindfold Lady. Well, it's much better she doesn't see *all* that's going on. That, in fact, was our English version of the Palais de Justice, complete with murals, marble statues, and underground accommodation for some of the choicest villains in London.

Terrible things go on down the Bailey—horrifying things. Why is it I never go in the revolving door without a thrill of pleasure, a slight tremble of excitement? Why does it seem a much *jollier* place

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than my flat in Gloucester Road under the strict rule of She Who Must Be Obeyed? These are questions which may only be partly answered in the course of these memoirs.

At the time when I was waving a cheerful umbrella at Harry, the policeman in the revolving door of the Old Bailey extension, my wife Hilda was at her daddy's bedside at the Horsham General, arranging her dozen early daffs and gently probing, so she told me that evening, on the subject of his future, and mine.

"I'll have to give up, you know. I can't go on forever. Crocked up, I'm afraid," said Wystan.

"Nonsense, Daddy. You'll go on for years."

I imagine Hilda did her best to sound bracing, whilst putting the daffs firmly in their place.

"No, Hilda. No. They'll have to start looking for another Head of Chambers."

This gave Hilda her opportunity. "Rumpole's the senior man. Apart from Uncle Tom and he doesn't really practice nowadays."

"Your husband the senior man." Wystan looked back on a singularly uneventful life. "How time flies! I recall when he was the junior man. My pupil."

"You said he was the best youngster on bloodstains you'd ever known." Hilda was doing her best for me.

"Rumpole! Yes, your husband was pretty good on bloodstains. Shaky, though, on the law of landlord and tenant. What sort of practice has Rumpole now?"

"I believe— Today it's the Old Bailey." Hilda was plumping pillows, doing her best to sound casual. And her father showed no particular enthusiasm for my place of work.

"It's always the Old Bailey, isn't it?"

"Most of the time. Yes. I suppose so."

"Not a frightfully good *address*, the Old Bailey. Not exactly the S.W.1 of the legal profession."

Sensing that Daddy would have thought better of me if I'd been in the Court of Appeal or the Chancery Division, Hilda told me she thought of a master stroke.

"Oh, Rumpole only went down to the Bailey because it's a family he knows. It seems they've got a young boy in trouble."

This appealed to Daddy. He gave one of his bleak smiles which amount to no more than a brief withdrawal of lips from the dentures.

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"Son gone wrong?" he said. "Very sad that. Especially if he comes of a really good family."

That really good family, the Timsons, was out in force and waiting outside Number 1 Court by the time I had got on the fancy dress, yellowing horse-hair wig, gown become more than a trifle tattered over the years, and bands round the neck that Albert ought to have sent to the laundry after last week's death by dangerous driving. As I looked at the Timson clan assembled, I thought the best thing about them was the amount of work of a criminal nature they had brought into Chambers. They were all dressed for the occasion, the men in dark blazers, suede shoes, and grey flannels; the ladies in tight-fitting suits, high heels, and elaborately piled hairdos. I had never seen so many ex-clients together at one time.

"Mr. Rumpole."

"Ah, Bernard! You're instructing me."

Mr. Bernard, the solicitor, was a thirtyish, perpetually smiling man in a pinstriped suit. He regarded criminals with something of the naive fervor with which young girls think of popular entertainers. Had I known the expression at the time, I would have called him a grafters' groupie.

"I'm always your instructing solicitor in a Timson case, Mr. Rumpole." Mr. Bernard beamed and Fred Timson, a kindly man and most innocent robber, stepped out of the ranks to do the honors.

"Nothing but the best for the Timsons, best solicitor and best barrister going. You know my wife Vi?"

Young Jim's mother seemed full of confidence. As I took her hand, I remembered I had got Vi off on a handling charge after the Croydon bank raid. Well, there was really no evidence.

"Uncle Cyril," Fred introduced the plumpish uncle with the small moustache whom I was sure I remembered. What was *his* last outing exactly? Carrying house-breaking instruments by night?

"Uncle Dennis. You remember Den, surely, Mr. Rumpole?"

I did. Den's last little matter was an alleged conspiracy to forge log books.

"And Den's Doris."

Aunty Doris came at me in a blur of hennaed hair and darkish perfume. What was Doris's last indiscretion? Could it have been receiving a vast quantity of stolen scampi? Acquitted by a majority, at least I was sure of that.

"And yours truly. Frederick Timson. The boy's father."

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Regrettable, but we had a slip-up with Fred's last spot of bother. I was away with flu, George Frobisher took it over, and he got three years. He must've only just got out.

"So, Mr. Rumpole. You know the whole family."

A family to breed from, the Timsons. Must almost keep the Old Bailey going single-handed.

"You're going to do your best for our young Jim, I'm sure, Mr. Rumpole."

I didn't find the simple faith of the Timsons that I could secure acquittals in the most unlikely circumstances especially encouraging. But then Jim's mother said something which I was to long remember.

"He's a good boy. He was ever so good to me while Dad was away."

So that was Jimbo's life. Head of the family at fourteen, when Dad was off on one of his regular visits to Her Majesty.

"It's young Jim's first appearance, like. At the Old Bailey." Fred couldn't conceal a note of pride. It was Jim boy's Bar Mitzvah, his First Communion.

So we chatted a little about how all the other boys got clean away, which I told them was a bit of luck as none of them would go into the witness box and implicate Jim, and Bernard pointed out that the identification by the butchers was pretty hopeless. Well, what did he expect? Would you have a photographic impression of the young hopeful who struck you a smart blow on the back of the head with a cricket stump?

We talked with that curious suppressed excitement there always is before a trial, however disastrous the outcome may be, and I told them the only thing we had to worry about, as if that were not enough, was Jim's confession to the boy in the Remand Center, a youth who rejoiced in the name of Peanuts Molloy.

"Peanuts Molloy! Little grass." Fred Timson spoke with a deep contempt.

"Old Persil White fitted him up with that one, didn't he?" Uncle Cyril said it as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and only to be expected.

"Chief Detective Inspector White," Bernard explained.

"Why should the Chief Inspector want to fit up your Jimbo?" It was a question to which I should have known what their answer would be.

"Because he's a Timson, that's why!" said Fred.

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"Because he's the apple of our eye, like," Uncle Den told me, and the boy's mother added:

"Being as he's the baby of the family."

"Old Persil'd fit up his mother if it'd get him a smile from his Super." As Fred said this, the Chief Inspector himself, grey-haired and avuncular, walked by in plainclothes, with a plainclothes sergeant.

"Morning, Chief Inspector," Fred carried on without drawing breath.

"Morning, Fred. Morning, Mrs. Timson." The Chief Inspector greeted the family with casual politeness—after all, they were part of his daily work—and Vi sniffed back a "Good morning, Chief Inspector."

"Mr. Timson. We'll shift our ground. Remove, good friends."

Like Hamlet, after seeing the ghost, I thought it was better to continue our conference in private. So we went and sat round a table in the canteen, and when we had sorted out who took how many lumps and which of them could do with a choc roll or a cheese sandwich the family gave me the lowdown on the chief prosecution witness.

"The Chief Inspector put that little grass Peanuts Molloy into Jim's painting class at the Remand Centre." Fred had no doubt about it.

"Jim apparently poured out his soul to Peanuts." The evidence sounded, to my old ears, completely convincing, and Bernard read us a snatch from his file.

"We planned to do the old blokes from the butcher's and grab the wages—"

"That," I reminded the assembled company, "is what Peanuts will say Jim told him."

"You think I'd bring Jim up to talk in the nick like that? The Timsons ain't stupid!" Fred was outraged, and Vi, pursing her lips in a sour gesture of wounded respectability, added, "His dad always told him, 'Never say a word to anyone you're banged up with—bound to be a grass.' "

One by one, Aunty Doris, Uncle Den, and Uncle Cyril added their support.

"That's right. Fred's always brought the boy up proper. Like the way he should be. He'd never speak about the crime, not to anyone he was banged up with."

"Specially not to one of the Molloys!"

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"The Molloys!" Vi spoke for the Timsons, and with deep hatred. "Noted grasses. That family always has been."

"The Molloys is beyond the pale. Well known for it." Aunty Doris nodded her hennaed topknot wisely.

"Peanuts's grandad shopped my old father in the 'Streatham Co-op Robbery.' Pre-war, that was."

I had a vague memory then of what Fred Timson was talking about. The Streatham Co-op case, one of my better briefs—a long case with not much honor shown among thieves, as far as I could remember.

"Then you can understand, Mr. Rumpole. No Timson would ever speak to a Molloy."

"So you're sure Jimbo never said anything to Peanuts?" I was wondering exactly how I could explain the deep, but not particularly creditable, origins of this family hostility to the jury.

"I give you my word, Mr. Rumpole. Ain't that enough for you? No Timson would ever speak to a Molloy. Not under any circumstances."

There were not many matters on which I would take Fred Timson's word, but the history of the Streatham Co-op case came back to me, and this was one of them.

It's part of the life of an Old Bailey Hack to spend a good deal of his time down in the cells, in the basement area, where they keep the old door of Newgate, kicked and scarred, through which generations of villains were sent to the treadmill, the gallows, or the whip. You pass this venerable door and ring a bell, you're let in, and your name's taken by one of the warders who bring the prisoners from Brixton. There's a perpetual smell of cooking and the warders are snatching odd snacks of six inches of cheese butties and a gallon of tea. Lunch is being got ready, and the cells under the Bailey have a high reputation as one of the best caffs in London. By the door the screws have their pinups and comic cartoons of judges. You are taken to a waiting room, three steel chairs and a table, and you meet the client. Perhaps he is a novice making his first appearance, like Jim Timson. Perhaps he's an old hand asking anxiously which judge he's got, knowing their form as accurately as a betting-shop proprietor. Whoever he is, the client will be nervously excited, keyed up for his great day, full of absurd hope.

The worst part of a barrister's life at the Old Bailey is going back to the cells after a guilty verdict to say goodbye. There's no purpose in it, but as a point of honor it has to be done. Even then the barrister

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probably gets the best reaction, and almost never any blame. The client is stunned, knocked out by his sentence. Only in a couple of weeks' time, when the reality of being banged up with the sour smell of stone walls and his own chamber pot for company becomes apparent, does the convict start to weep. He is then drugged with sedatives and Agatha Christies from the prison library.

When I saw the youngest Timson before his trial that morning, I couldn't help noticing how much smaller, and how much more experienced, he looked than my Nick. In his clean sports jacket and carefully knotted tie he was well dressed for the dock, and he showed all the carefully suppressed excitement of a young lad about to step into the limelight of Number 1 with an old judge, twelve jurors, and a mixed bag of lawyers waiting to give him their undivided attention.

"Me speak to Peanuts? No Timson don't ever speak to a Molloy. It's a point of honor, like," Jim added his voice to the family chorus.

"Since the raid on the Streatham Co-op. Your grandfather?"

"Dad told you about that, did he?"

"Yes. Dad told me."

"Well, Dad wouldn't let me speak to no Molloy. He wouldn't put up with it, like."

I stood up, grinding out the stub end of my small cigar in the old Oxo tin thoughtfully provided by H.M.'s government. It was, I thought, about time I called the meeting to order.

"So, Jim," I asked him, "what's the defense?"

Little Jim knitted his brows and came out with his contribution. "Well. I didn't do it."

"That's an interesting defense. Somewhat novel—so far as the Timsons are concerned."

"I've got my alibi, ain't I?"

Jim looked at me accusingly, as at an insensitive visitor to a garden who has failed to notice the remarkable display of gladioli.

"Oh, yes. Your alibi." I'm afraid I didn't sound overwhelmed with enthusiasm.

"Dad reckoned it was pretty good."

Mr. Bernard had his invaluable file open and was reading from that less-than-inspiring document, our Notice of Alibi.

"Straight from school on that Friday, September second, I went up to tea at my Aunt Doris's and arrived there at exactly five-thirty. At six P.M. my Uncle Den came home from work accompanied by my Uncle Cyril. At seven P.M. when this alleged crime was taking place

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I was sat round the television with my auntie and two uncles. I well remember we was watching 'The Newcomers.' "

All very neat and workmanlike. Well, that was it. The family gave young Jim an alibi, clubbed together for it, like a new bicycle. However, I had to disappoint Mr. Bernard about the bright shining alibi and we went through the swing doors on our way into Court.

"We can't use that alibi."

"We can't?" Mr. Bernard looked wounded, as if I'd just insulted his favorite child.

"Think about it, Bernard. Don't be blinded by the glamor of the criminal classes. Call the uncles and the aunties? Let them all be cross-examined about their records? The jury'll realize our Jimbo comes from a family of villains who keep a cupboard full of alibis for all occasions."

Mr. Bernard was forced to agree, but I went into my old place in Court (nearest to the jury, farthest from the witness box) thinking that the devilish thing about that impossible alibi was that it might even be true.

So there I was, sitting in my favorite seat in Court, down in the firing line, and there was Jim boy, undersized for a prisoner, just peeping over the edge of the dock, guarded—in case he ran amok and started attacking the judge—by a huge Dock Officer. There was the jury, solid and grey, listening impassionately as Guthrie Featherstone spread out his glittering mass of incriminating facts before them. I don't know why it is that juries all look the same; take twelve good men and women off the street and they all look middle-aged, anonymous, slightly stunned, an average jury of average people trying an average case. Perhaps being a jury has become a special profession for specially average people. "What do you want to do when you grow up, my boy?" "Be a jury man, Daddy." "Well done, my boy. You can work a five-hour day for reasonable expenses and occasionally send people to chokey."

So, as the carefully chosen words of Guthrie Featherstone passed over our heads like expensive hair oil, and as the enthusiastic young MacLay noted it all down, and the Rumpole Supporters Club, the Timsons, sat and pursed their lips and now and then whispered, "Lies. All lies," to each other, I sat watching the judge rather as a noted toreador watches the bull from the barrier during the preliminary stages of the corrida, and remembered what I knew of Mr. Justice Everglade, known to his few friends as "Florrie." Everglade's father was Lord Chancellor about the time when Jim's grandfather

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was doing over the Streatham Co-op. Educated at Winchester and Balliol, he always cracked *The Times* crossword in the opening of an egg. He was most happy with International Trust companies suing each other on nice points of law and was only there for a fortnight's slumming down the Old Bailey. I wondered exactly what he was going to make of Peanuts Molloy.

"Members of the jury, it's right that you should know that it is alleged that Timson took part in this attack with a number of other youths, none of whom have been arrested," Featherstone was purring to a halt.

"The boy stood on the burning deck whence all but he had fled," I muttered, but the judge was busy congratulating learned counsel for Her Majesty the Queen, who was engaged that morning in prosecuting the pride of the Timsons.

"It is quite right you should tell the jury that, Mr. Featherstone. Perfectly right and proper."

"If your Lordship pleases." Featherstone was now bowing slightly, and my hackles began to rise. What was this? The old chums' league? Fellow members of the Athenaeum?

"I am most grateful to your Lordship for that indication." Featherstone did his well known butler-passing-the-sherry act again. I wondered why the old darling didn't crawl up on the bench with Mr. Justice Everglade and black his boots for him.

"So I imagine this young man's defense is—he wasn't *ejusdem generis* with the other lads?" The judge was now holding a private conversation, a mutual-admiration society, with my learned friend. I decided to break it up and levered myself to my feet.

"I'm sorry. Your Lordship was asking about the defense?"

The judge turned an unfriendly eye on me and fumbled for my name. I told you he was a stranger to the Old Bailey, where the name of Rumpole is, I think, tolerably well known.

"Yes, Mr.—er—" the clerk of the Court handed him up a note on which the defender's name was inscribed "—Rumpole."

"I am reluctant to intrude on your Lordship's confidential conversation with my learned friend. But your Lordship was asking about the defense."

"You are appearing for the young man—Timson?"

"I have that honor."

At which point the doors of the Court swung open and Albert came in with Nick, a boy in a blazer and a school-tie who passed the boy in the dock with only a glance of curiosity. I always thank God,

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when I consider the remote politeness with which I was treated by the Reverend Wilfred Rumpole, that I get on extremely well with Nick. We understand each other, my boy and I, and have, when he's at home, formed a strong but silent alliance against the almost invincible rule of She Who Must Be Obeyed. He is as fond as I am of the Sherlock Holmes tales, and when we walked together in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens young Nick often played the part of Holmes whilst I trudged beside him as Watson, trying to deduce the secret lives of those we passed by the way they shined their shoes or kept their handkerchiefs in their sleeves. So I gave a particularly welcoming smile to Nick before I gave my attention back to Florrie.

"And, as Jim Timson's counsel," I told his Lordship, "I might know a little more about his case than counsel for the prosecution."

To which Mr. Justice Everglade trotted out his favorite bit of Latin. "I imagine," he said loftily, "your client says he was not *ejusdem generis* with the other lads."

"*Ejusdem generis?* Oh yes, my Lord. He's always saying that. *Ejusdem generis* is a phrase in constant use in his particular part of Brixton."

I had hit a minor jackpot, and was rewarded with a tinkle of laughter from the Timsons and a smile of genuine congratulation from Nick.

Mr. Justice Everglade was inexperienced down the Bailey—he gave us a bare hour for lunch and Nick and I had it in the canteen. There is one thing you can say against crime, the catering facilities aren't up to much. Nick told me about school, and freely confessed, as I'm sure he wouldn't have done to his mother, that he'd been in some sort of trouble that term. There was an old deserted vicarage opposite Schoolhouse (my old House and Nick's) and he and his friends had apparently broken in the scullery window and assembled there for poker parties and the consumption of Cherry Brandy. I was horrified as I drew up the indictment, which seemed to me to contain charges of burglary at common law, housebreaking under the Forcible Entries Act, contravening the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries Act, and Serving Alcohol on Unlicensed Premises.

"Crabtree actually invited a couple of girls from the village," Nick continued his confession, "but Bagnold never got to hear of that."

Bagnold was Nick's headmaster, the school equivalent of Persil White. I cheered up a little at the last piece of information.

"Then there's no evidence of girls. As far as your case goes, there's

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no reason to suppose the girls ever existed. As for the other charges, which are serious—"

"Yes, yes, I suppose they are rather."

"I imagine you were walking past the house on Sunday evening and, attracted by the noise, you went to investigate?"

"Dad, Bagnold came in and found us playing poker."

Nick wasn't exactly being helpful. I tried another line.

"I know. 'My Lord. My client was only playing poker in order not to look too pious whilst he lectured his fellow sixth formers on the evils of gambling and Cherry Brandy.' "

"Dad. Be serious."

"I am serious. Don't you want me to defend you?"

"No. Bagnold's not going to tell the police or anything like that."

I was amazed. "He isn't? What's he going to do?"

"Well—I'll miss next term's exeat. Do extra work. I thought I should tell you before you got a letter."

"Thank you, Nick. Thank you. I'm glad you told me. So there's no question of—the police?"

"The police?" Nick was laughing. "Of course not. Bagnold doesn't want any trouble. After all, we're still at school."

I watched Nick as he finished his fish and chips and then turned my thoughts to Jim Timson, who had also been at school—but with no kindly Bagnold to protect him.

Back in Court I was cross-examining that notable grass, Peanuts Molloy, a skinnier, more furtive edition of Jim Timson. The cross-examination was being greatly enjoyed by the Timsons and Nick, but not much by Featherstone or Chief Detective Inspector Persil White, who sat at the table in front of me. I also thought that Mr. Justice Everglade was thinking that he would have been happier snoozing in the Athenaeum or working on his grosse-point in Egerton Terrace than listening to me bowling fast in-swingers at the juvenile chief witness for the prosecution.

"You don't speak. The Molloys and the Timsons are like the Montagues and the Capulets," I put it to Peanuts.

"What did you say they were?" The judge had, of course, given me my opportunity. I smacked him through the slips for a crafty single. "Not *ejusdem generis*, my Lord," I said.

Nick joined in the laughter and even the ranks of Featherstone had to stifle a smile. The usher called, "Silence." We were back to the business in hand.

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"Tell me, Peanuts—how would you describe yourself?"

"Is that a proper question?" Featherstone uncoiled himself gracefully. I ignored the interruption.

"I mean artistically. Are you a latter-day Impressionist? Do all your oils in little dots, do you? Abstract painter? White squares on a white background? Do you indulge in watches melting in the desert like dear old Salvador Dali?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Peanuts played a blocking shot and Featherstone tried a weary smile to the judge.

"My Lord, neither, I must confess, do I."

"Sit quietly, Featherstone," I muttered to him. "All will be revealed to you." I turned my attention back to Peanuts. "Are you a dedicated artist? The Rembrandt of the Remand Centre?"

"I hadn't done no art before." Peanuts confirmed my suspicions.

"So we are to understand that this occasion, when Jim poured out his heart to you, was the first painting lesson you'd ever been to?"

Peanuts admitted it.

"You'd been at the Remand Centre how long?"

"Couple of months. I was done for a bit of an affray."

"I didn't ask you that. And I'm sure the reason you were on remand was entirely creditable. What I want to know is, what inspired you with this sudden fascination for the arts?"

"Well, the chief screw. He suggested it."

Now we were beginning to get to the truth of the matter. Like his old grandfather in the Streatham Co-op days, Jim had been banged up with a notable grass.

"You were suddenly told to join the painting class, weren't you—and put yourself next to Jim?"

"Something like that, yeah."

"What did he say?" Florrie frowned. It was all very strange to him and yet he was starting to get the hint of something that wasn't quite cricket.

"Something like that, my Lord," I repeated slowly, giving the judge a chance to make a note. "And you were sent there, not in the pursuit of art, Peanuts, but in the pursuit of evidence! You knew that and you supplied your masters with just what they wanted to hear—even though Jim Timson didn't say a word to you!"

Everyone in Court, including Nick, looked impressed. D.I. White bit hard on a polo mint and Featherstone oozed to his feet in a rescue bid.

That's great, Dad!

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Thanks, Nick. Sorry it's not a murder.

"I don't know quite what my learned friend is saying. Is he suggesting that the police—"

"Oh, it's an old trick," I said, staring hard at the Chief Inspector. "Bang the suspect up with a notable grass when you're really pushed for evidence. They do it with grownups often enough. Now they're trying it with children!"

"Mr. Rumpole," the judge sighed, "you are speaking a language which is totally foreign to me."

"Let me try and make myself clear, my Lord. I was suggesting that Peanuts was put there as a deliberate trap."

By now even the judge had the point. "You are suggesting that Mr. Molloy was not a genuine 'amateur painter'?"

"No, my Lord. Merely an amateur witness."

"Yes." I actually got a faint smile. "I see. Please go on, Mr. Rumpole."

Another day or so of this, I felt, and I'd get invited to tea at the Athenaeum.

"What did you say first to Jim? As you drew your easel alongside?"

"Don't remember."

"Don't you?"

"I think we was speaking about the Stones."

"What stones are these?" The judge's ignorance of the life around him seemed to be causing him some sort of wild panic. Remember this was 1965, and I was in a similar state of confusion until Nick, whispering from behind me, gave me the clue.

"The Rolling Stones, my Lord." The information meant nothing to him.

"I'm afraid a great deal of this case seems to be taking place in a foreign tongue, Mr. Rumpole."

"Jazz musicians, as I understand it, my Lord, of some notoriety."

"Well, the notoriety hasn't reached me!" said the judge, providing the obedient Featherstone with the laugh of the year, if not the century. When the learned prosecuting counsel had recovered his solemnity, Peanuts went rambling on.

"We was talking about the Stones concert at the Hammersmith Odeon. We'd both been to it, like. And, well—we talked about that. And then he said—Jim said—well, he said as how he and the other blokes had done the butchers."

The conversation had now taken a nasty turn. I saw that the judge was writing industriously. "Jim said that he and the other blokes

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had done the butchers." Florrie was plying his pencil. Then he looked up at me. "Well, Mr. Rumpole, is that a convenient moment to adjourn?"

It was a very convenient moment for the prosecution, as the evidence against us would be the last thing the jury heard before sloping off to their homes and loved ones. It was also a convenient moment for Peanuts. He would have his second wind by the morning. So there was nothing for it but to take Nick for a cup of tea and a pile of crumpets in the A B C, and so home to She Who Must Be Obeyed.

So picture us three that evening, finishing dinner and a bottle of claret, celebrating the return of the Young Master at Hack Hall, Counsel's Castle, Rumpole Manor, or 25B Froxbury Court, Gloucester Road. Hilda had told Nick that his grandpa had sent his love and expected a letter, and also dropped me the encouraging news that old C. H. Wystan was retiring and quite appreciated that I was the senior man. Nick asked me if I was really going to be Head of Chambers, seeming to look at me with a new respect, and we drank a glass of claret to the future, whatever it might be. Then Nick asked me if I really thought Peanuts Molloy was lying.

"If he's not, he's giving a damn good imitation." Then I told Hilda as she started to clear away, "Nick enjoyed the case. Even though it was only a robbery. Oh, Nick, I wish you'd been there to hear me cross-examine about the bloodstains in the Penge Bungalow Murder."

"Nick wasn't born when you did the Penge Bungalow Murder."

My wife is always something of a wet blanket. I commiserated with my son. "Bad luck, old boy."

"You were great with that judge!"

I think Nick had really enjoyed himself.

"There was this extraordinary judge who was always talking Latin and Dad was teasing him."

"You want to be careful," Hilda was imposing her will on the pudding plates, "how you tease judges. If you're to be Head of Chambers." On which line she departed, leaving Nick and me to our claret and conversation. I began to discuss with Nick the horrifying adventure of *The Speckled Band*.

"You're still reading those tales, are you?" I asked Nick.

"Well—not lately."

"But you remember. I used to read them to you, didn't I? After She had ordered you to bed."

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"When you weren't too busy. Noting up your murders."

"And remember we were Holmes and Watson? When we went for walks in Hyde Park."

"I remember *one* walk."

That was odd—as I recall, it had been our custom ever at a weekend before Nick went away to boarding school. I lit a small cigar and looked at the Great Detective through the smoke.

"Tell me, Holmes. What did you think was the most remarkable piece of evidence given by the witness Peanuts Molloy?"

"When he said they talked about the Rolling Stones."

"Holmes, you astonish me."

"You see, Watson. We were led to believe they were such enemies, I mean, the families were. They'd never spoken."

"I see what you're driving at. Have another glass of claret —stimulates the detective ability." I opened another bottle, a clatter from the kitchen telling me that the lady was not about to join us.

"And there they were chatting about a pop concert. Didn't that strike you as strange, my dear Watson?"

"It struck me as bloody rum, if you want to know the truth, Holmes." I was delighted to see Nick taking over the case.

"They'd both been to the concert. Well, that doesn't mean anything. Not necessarily—I mean, *I* was at that concert."

"Were you indeed?"

"It was at the end of the summer holidays."

"I don't remember you mentioning it."

"I said I was going to the Festival Hall."

I found this confidence pleasing, knowing that it wasn't to be shared with Hilda.

"Very wise. Your mother no doubt feels that at the Hammersmith Odeon they re-enact some of the worst excesses of the Roman Empire. You didn't catch sight of Peanuts and young Jimbo, did you?"

"There were about two thousand fans—all screaming."

"If they were old mates, Jim might really have confided in him. All the same, Peanuts is lying. And *you* noticed it! You've got the instinct, Nick. You've got a nose for the evidence! Your career at the Bar is bound to be brilliant." I raised my glass to Nick. "When are you taking silk?"

Shortly after this, She entered with news that Nick had a dentist's appointment the next day, which would prevent his reappearance down the Bailey. All the same, he had given me a great deal of help and before I went to bed I telephoned Bernard the solicitor, tore him

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away from his fireside, and instructed him to undertake some pretty immediate research.

Next morning, Albert told me that he'd had a letter from old C. H. Wystan, Hilda's daddy, mentioning his decision to retire.

"I think we'll manage pretty well, with you, Mr. Rumpole, as Head of Chambers," Albert told me. "There's not much you and I won't be able to sort out, sir, over a glass or two in Pommeroy's Wine Bar. And soon we'll be welcoming Master Nick in Chambers?"

"Nick? Well, yes." I had to admit it. "He is showing a certain legal aptitude."

"It'll be a real family affair, Mr. Rumpole. Like father, like son, if you want my opinion."

I remembered Albert's words when I saw Fred Timson waiting for me outside the Court. But before I had time to brood on family tradition, Bernard came up with the rolled-up poster for a pop concert. I grabbed it from him and carried it as unobtrusively as possible into Court.

"When Jim told you he'd done up the butchers—he didn't tell you the date that that had happened?" Peanuts was back, facing the bowling, and Featherstone was up to his usual tricks, rising to interrupt.

"My Lord, the date is set out quite clearly in the indictment."

The time had come, quite obviously, for a burst of righteous indignation.

"My Lord, I am cross-examining on behalf of a sixteen-year-old boy on an extremely serious charge. I'd be grateful if my learned friend didn't supply information which all of us in Court know—except for the witness."

"Very well. Do carry on, Mr. Rumpole." I was almost beginning to like Mr. Justice Everglade.

"No. He never told me when, like. I thought it was sometime in the summer." Peanuts tried to sound cooperative.

"Sometime in the summer? Are you a fan of the Rolling Stones, Peanuts?"

"Yes."

"Remind me. They were—" Still vaguely puzzled, the judge was hunting back through his notes.

Sleek as a butler with a dish of peas, Featherstone supplied the information. "The musicians, my Lord."

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"And so was Jim a fan?" I ploughed on, ignoring the gentleman's gentleman.

"He was. Yes."

"You had discussed music, before you met in the Remand Centre?"

"Before the nick. Oh, yes." Peanuts was following me obediently down the garden path.

"You used to talk about it at school?"

"Yes."

"In quite a friendly way?" I was conscious of a startled Fred Timson looking at his son, and of Jim in the dock looking, for the first time, ashamed.

"We was all right. Yes."

"Did you ever go to a concert with Jimbo? Please think carefully."

"We went to one or two concerts together," Peanuts conceded.

"In the evening?"

"Yes."

"What would you do? Call at his home and collect him?"

"You're joking!"

"Oh, no, Peanuts. In this case I'm not joking at all." No harm, I thought, at that stage, in underlining the seriousness of the occasion.

"Course I wouldn't call at his home!"

"Your families don't speak. You wouldn't be welcomed in each other's houses?"

"The Montagues and the Capulets, Mr. Rumpole?" The old sweetheart on the bench had finally got the message. I gave him a bow, to show my true love and affection.

"If your Lordship pleases—your Lordship puts it extremely aptly." I turned back to Peanuts. "So what would you do if you were going to a concert?"

"We'd leave school together, like—and then hang around the caffs."

"Hang around the caffs?"

"Caf*ays*, Mr. Rumpole?" Mr. Justice Everglade was enjoying himself, translating the answer.

"Yes, of course, the caf*ays*. Until it was time to go up West? If my Lord would allow me, up to the West End of London together?"

"Yes."

"So you wouldn't be separated on these evenings you went to concerts together?" It was one of those questions after which you hold your breath. There can be so many wrong answers.

"No. We hung around together."

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Rumpole breathed a little more easily, but still had the final question, the great gamble, with all Jim Timson's chips firmly piled on the red. *Fait vos jeux, m'sieurs et mesdames* of the Old Bailey jury. I spun the wheel.

"And did that happen—when you went to the Rolling Stones at the Hammersmith Odeon?"

A nasty silence. Then the ball rattled into the hole.

Peanuts said, "Yes."

"That was this summer, wasn't it?" We were into the straight now, cantering home.

"In the summer, yeah."

"You left school together?"

"And hung around the caffs, like. Then we went up the Odeon."

"Together—all the time?"

"I told you, didn't I?" Peanuts looked bored, and then amazed as I unrolled the poster Bernard had brought, rushed by taxi from Hammersmith, with the date clearly printed across the bottom.

"My Lord. My learned friend might be interested to know the date of the only Rolling Stones concert at the Hammersmith Odeon this year." I gave Featherstone an unwelcome eyeful of the poster.

"He might like to compare it with the date so conveniently set out in the indictment."

When the subsequent formalities were over, I went down to the cells. This was not a visit of commiseration, no time for a "sorry, old sweetheart, but" and a deep consciousness of having asked one too many questions. All the same, I was in no gentle mood. In fact, it would be fair to say that I was bloody angry with Jimbo.

"You had an alibi! You had a proper, reasonable, truthful alibi, and, joy of joys, it came from the prosecution! Why the hell didn't you tell me?"

Jim, who seemed to have little notion of the peril he had passed, answered me quite calmly, "Dad wouldn't've liked it."

"Dad! What's Dad got to do with it?" I was astonished.

"He wouldn't've liked it, Mr. Rumpole. Not me going out with Peanuts."

"So you were quite ready to be found guilty, to be convicted of robbery, just because your dad wouldn't like you going out with Peanuts Molloy?"

"Dad got the family to alibi me." Jim clearly felt that the Timsons had done their best for him.

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"Keep it in the family!" Though it was heavily laid on, the irony was lost on Jim. He smiled politely and stood up, eager to join the clan upstairs.

"Well, anyway. Thanks a lot, Mr. Rumpole. Dad said I could rely on you. To win the day, like. I'd better collect me things."

If Jim thought I was going to let him get away as easily as that, he was mistaken. Rumpole rose in his crumpled gown, doing his best to represent the majesty of the law. "No! Wait a minute. I didn't win the day. It was luck. The purest fluke. It won't happen again!"

"You're joking, Mr. Rumpole." Jim thought I was being modest. "Dad told me about you. He says you never let the Timsons down."

I had a sudden vision of my role in life from young Jim's point of view and I gave him the voice of outrage which I use frequently in Court. I had a message of importance for Jim Timson.

"Do you think that's what I'm here for? To help you along in a career like your dad's?" Jim was still smiling, maddeningly. "My God! I shouldn't have asked those questions! I shouldn't have found out the date of the concert! Then you'd really be happy, wouldn't you? You could follow in Dad's footsteps all your life! Sharp spell of Borstal training to teach you the mysteries of housebreaking, and then a steady life in the nick. You might really do well! You might end up in Parkhurst, Maximum Security Wing, doing a glamorous twenty years and a hero to the screws."

At which the door opened and a happy screw entered for the purpose of springing young Jim—until the inevitable next time.

"We've got his things at the gate, Mr. Rumpole. Come on, Jim. You can't stay here all night."

"I've got to go," Jim agreed. "I don't know how to face Dad, really. Me being so friendly with Peanuts."

"Jim." I tried a last appeal. "If you're at all grateful for what I did—"

"Oh, I am, Mr. Rumpole, I'm quite satisfied." Generous of him.

"Then you can perhaps repay me."

"Why—aren't you on Legal Aid?"

"It's not that! Leave him—leave your dad."

Jim frowned. For a moment he seemed to think it over. Then he said, "I don't know as how I can."

"You don't know?"

"Mum depends on me, you see. Like when Dad goes away. She depends on me then, as head of the family."

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So he left me, and went up to temporary freedom and his new responsibilities.

My mouth was dry and I felt about ninety years old, so I took the lift up to that luxurious eatery, the Old Bailey canteen, for a cup of tea and a Penguin biscuit. And, pushing his tray along past the urns, I met a philosophic Chief Inspector Persil White. He noticed my somewhat lugubrious expression and tried a cheering, "Don't look so miserable, Mr. Rumpole. You won, didn't you?"

"Nobody won. The truth emerges sometimes, Inspector, even down the Old Bailey." I must have sounded less than gracious. The wily old copper smiled tolerantly.

"He's a Timson. It runs in the family. We'll get him sooner or later!"

"Yes. Yes, I suppose you will."

At a table in a corner, I found certain members of my Chambers—George Frobisher, Percy Hoskins, and young Tony MacLay—now resting from their labors, their wigs lying among cups of Old Bailey tea, buns, and choccy bics. I joined them. Wordsworth entered my head and I gave him an airing. *"Trailing clouds of glory do we come."*

"Marvelous win, that. I was telling them." Young MacLay thought I was announcing my triumph.

"Yes, Rumpole. I hear you've had a splendid win." Old George, ever generous, smiled, genuinely pleased.

"It'll be *years* before you get the check," Hoskins grumbled.

"Not in entire forgetfulness and not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory do we come From God Who is our home . . ." I was thinking of Jim, trying to sort out his situation with the help of Wordsworth.

"You don't get paid for years at the Old Bailey. I try to tell my grocer that. If you had to wait as long to be paid for a pound of sugar, I tell him, as we do for an armed robbery—" Hoskins was warming to a well loved theme, but George, dear old George, was smiling at me.

"Albert tells me he's had a letter from Wystan. I just wanted to say, I'm sure we'd all like to say, you'll make a splendid Head of Chambers, Rumpole."

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy, Shades of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy. But he beholds the light, and whence it flows. He sees it in his joy." I gave them another brief

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glimpse of immortality. George looked quite proud of me and told MacLay, "Rumpole quotes poetry. He does it quite often."

"But does the growing boy behold the light?" I wondered. "Or was the old sheep of the Lake District being unduly optimistic?"

"It'll be refreshing for us all to have a Head of Chambers who quotes poetry," George went on, at which point Percy Hoskins produced a newspaper which turned out to contain an item of news for us all.

"Have you seen *The Times*, Rumpole?"

"No, I haven't had time for the crossword."

"Guthrie Featherstone. He's taken silk."

It was the apotheosis, the great day for the Labour-Conservative Member for wherever it was, one-time unsuccessful prosecutor of Jim Timson and now one of Her Majesty's counsel, called within the Bar, and he went down to the House of Lords tailored out in his new silk gown, a lace jabot, knee breeches with diamanté buckles, patent shoes, black-silk stockings, lace cuffs, and a full-bottomed wig that made him look like a pedigree, but not overbright spaniel. However, Guthrie Featherstone was a tall man, with a good calf in a silk stocking, and he took with him Marigold, his lady wife, who was young enough, and I suppose pretty enough, for Henry our junior clerk to eye wistfully, although she had the sort of voice that puts me instantly in mind of headscarves and gymkhanas, that high-pitched nasal whining a girl learns from too much contact with the saddle when young, and too little with the Timsons of this world in later life.

The couple were escorted by Albert, who'd raided Moss Bros for a top hat and morning coat for the occasion, and when the Lord Chancellor had welcomed Guthrie to that special club of Queen's Counsel (on whose advice the Queen, luckily for her, never has to rely for a moment) they came back to Chambers, where champagne (the N.V. cooking variety, bulk bought from Pommeroy's Wine Bar) was served by Henry and old Miss Patterson, our typist, in Wystan's big room looking out over Temple Gardens. C. H. Wystan, our retiring Head, was not among those present as the party began, and I took an early opportunity to get stuck into the beaded bubbles.

After the fourth glass, I felt able to relax a bit and wandered to where Featherstone, in all his finery, was holding forth to Erskine-Brown about the problems of appearing *en travestie*. I arrived just as he was saying, "It's the stockings that're the problem."

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"Oh, yes. They would be." I did my best to sound interested.

"Keeping them up."

"I do understand."

"Well, Marigold—my wife Marigold—" I looked across to where Mrs. Q.C. was tinkling with laughter at some old legal anecdote of Uncle Tom's. It was a laugh that seemed in some slight danger of breaking the wine glasses.

"*That* Marigold?"

"Her sister's a nurse—and she put me in touch with this shop which supplies suspender belts to nurses, among other things."

"Really?" This conversation seemed to arouse some dormant sexual interest in Erskine-Brown.

"Yards of elastic, for the larger ward sister. But it works miraculously."

"You're wearing a suspender belt?" Erskine-Brown was frankly fascinated. "You sexy devil!"

"I hadn't realized the full implications," I told the Q.C., "of rising to the heights of the legal profession."

I wandered off to where Uncle Tom was giving Marigold a brief history of life in our Chambers over the last half century. Percy Hoskins was in attendance, and George.

"It's some time since we had champagne in Chambers." Uncle Tom accepted a refill from Albert.

"It's some time since we had a silk in Chambers." Hoskins smiled at Marigold, who flashed a row of well groomed teeth back at him.

"I recall we had a man in Chambers once called Drinkwater—oh, before you were born, Hoskins. And some fellow came and paid Drinkwater a hundred guineas for six months' pupilage. And you know what this Drinkwater fellow did? Bought us all champagne—and the next day he ran off to Calais with his junior clerk. We never saw hide nor hair of either of them again." He paused. Marigold looked puzzled, not quite sure if this was the punch line.

"Of course, you could get a lot further in those days on a hundred guineas," Uncle Tom ended on a sad note, and Marigold laughed heartily.

"Your husband's star has risen so quickly, Mrs. Featherstone. Only ten years' call and he's an M.P. *and* leading counsel." Hoskins was clearly so excited by the whole business he had stopped worrying about his checks for half an hour.

"Oh, it's the P.R., you know. Guthrie's frightfully good at the P.R."

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I felt like Everglade. Marigold was speaking a strange and incomprehensible language.

"Guthrie always says the most important thing at the Bar is to be polite to your instructing solicitor. Don't you find that, Mr. Rumpole?"

"Polite to solicitors? It's never occurred to me."

"Guthrie admires you so, Mr. Rumpole. He admires your style of advocacy."

I had just sunk another glass of the beaded bubbles as passed by Albert and I felt a joyous release from my usual strong sense of tact and discretion.

"I suppose it makes a change from bowing three times and offering to black the judge's boots for him."

Marigold's smile didn't waver. "He says you're most amusing out of Court, too. Don't you quote poetry?"

"Only in moments of great sadness, Madam. Or extreme elation."

"Guthrie's so looking forward to leading you. In his next big case."

This was an eventuality which I should have taken into account as soon as I saw Guthrie in silk stockings—as a matter of fact it had never occurred to me.

"Leading *me?* Did you say, *leading* me?"

"Well, he has to have a junior now—doesn't he? Naturally he wants the best junior available."

"Now he's a leader?"

"Now he's left the Junior Bar."

I raised my glass and gave Marigold a version of Browning. "Just for a pair of knee breeches he left us. Just for an elastic suspender belt, as supplied to the Nursing profession . . ."

At which the Q.C. himself bore down on us in a rustle of silk and drew me into a corner.

"I just wanted to say I don't see why recent events should make the slightest difference to the situation in Chambers. You *are* the senior man in practice, Rumpole."

Henry was passing with the fizzing bottle. I held out my glass and the tide ran foaming in it.

"You wrong me, Brutus," I told Featherstone. *"You said an older soldier, not a better."*

"A quotation! *Touché*, very apt."

"Is it?"

"I mean, all this will make absolutely no difference. I'll still support you, Rumpole, as the right candidate for Head of Chambers."

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I didn't know about being a candidate, having thought of the matter as settled and not being much of a political animal. But before I had time to reflect on whatever the Honourable Member was up to, the door opened, letting in a formidable draught and the Head of Chambers. C. H. Wystan, She's daddy, wearing a tweed suit, extremely pale, supported by Albert on one side and a stick on the other, made the sort of formidable entrance that the ghost of Banquo stages at dinner with the Macbeths. Wystan was installed in an armchair, from which he gave us all the sort of wintry smile which seemed designed to indicate that all flesh is as the grass, or something to that effect.

"Albert wrote to me about this little celebration. I was determined to be with you. And the doctor has given permission for no more than one glass of champagne."

Wystan held out a transparent hand into which Albert inserted a glass of non vintage. Wystan lifted this with some apparent effort, and gave us a toast.

"To the great change in Chambers! Now we have a silk. Guthrie Featherstone, Q.C., M.P.!"

I had a large refill to that. Wystan absorbed a few bubbles, wiped his mouth on a clean, folded handkerchief, and proceeded to the oration. Wystan was never a great speech maker, but I claimed another refill and gave him my ears.

"You, Featherstone, have brought a great distinction to Chambers."

"Isn't that nice, Guthrie?" Marigold proprietorially squeezed her master's fingers.

"You know, when I was a young man—you remember when we were young men, Uncle Tom?—we used to hang around in Chambers for weeks on end." Wystan had gone on about these distant hard times at every Chambers meeting. "I well recall we used to occupy ourselves with an old golfball and mashie niblick, trying to get chip shots into the wastepaper baskets. Albert was a boy then."

"A mere child, Mr. Wystan." Albert looked suitably demure.

"And we used to pray for work. *Any* sort of work, didn't we, Uncle Tom?"

"We were tempted to crime. Only way we could get into Court." Uncle Tom took the feed line like a professional. Moderate laughter, except for Rumpole who was busy drinking. And then I heard Wystan rambling on.

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"But as you grow older at the Bar you discover it's not having any work that matters. It's the *quality* that counts!"

"Hear, hear! I'm always saying we ought to do more civil." This was the dutiful Erskine-Brown, inserting his oar.

"Now Guthrie Featherstone, Q.C., M.P., will, of course, command briefs in all divisions—Planning, Contract—" Wystan's voice sank to a note of awe "—even Chancery! I was so afraid, after I've gone, that this Chambers might become known as merely a criminal set." Wystan's voice now sank in a sort of horror. "And, of course, there's no doubt about it, too much criminal work does rather lower the standing of a Chambers."

"Couldn't you install pithead baths?"

I hadn't actually meant to say it aloud, but it came out very loud indeed.

"Ah, Horace." Wystan turned his pale eyes on me for the first time.

"So we could have a good scrubdown after we get back from the Old Bailey?"

"Now, Horace Rumpole. And I mean no disrespect whatever to my son-in-law." Wystan returned to the oration. From far away I heard myself say, "Daddy!" as I raised the hard-working glass. "Horace does practice almost exclusively in the Criminal Courts!"

"One doesn't get the really fascinating points of *law*. Not in criminal work," Erskine-Brown was adding unwanted support to the motion. "I've often thought we should try and attract some really lucrative tax cases into Chambers."

That, I'm afraid, did it. Just as if I were in Court, I moved slightly to the center and began my speech.

"Tax cases?" I saw them all smiling encouragement at me. "Marvelous! Tax cases make the world go round. Compared to the wonderful world of tax, crime is totally trivial. What does it matter if some boy loses a year, a couple of years, of his life? It's totally unimportant! Anyway, he'll grow up to be banged up for a good five, shut up with his own chamber pot in some convenient hole we all prefer not to think about." There was a deafening silence, which came loudest from Marigold Featherstone. Then Wystan tried to reach a settlement.

"Now then, Horace. Your practice no doubt requires a good deal of skill."

"Skill? Who said 'skill'?" I glared round at the learned friends.

"Any fool could do it! It's only a matter of life and death. That's

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all it is. Crime? It's a sort of game. How can you compare it to the real world of Off Shore Securities? And Deductible Expenses?"

"All you young men in Chambers can learn an enormous amount from Horace Rumpole when it comes to crime." Wystan now seemed to be the only one who was still smiling. I turned on him.

"You make me sound just like Fred Timson!"

"Really? Whoever's Fred Timson?" I told you Wystan never had much of a practice at the Bar, consequently he had never met the Timsons. Erskine-Brown supplied the information.

"The Timsons are Rumpole's favorite family."

"An industrious clan of South London criminals, aren't they, Rumpole?" Hoskins added.

Wystan looked particularly pained. "South London criminals?"

"I mean, do we want people like the Timsons forever hanging about in our waiting room? I merely ask the question." He was not bad, this Erskine-Brown, with a big future in the nastier sort of Breach of Trust cases.

"Do you? Do you merely ask it?" I heard the pained bellow of a distant Rumpole.

"The Timsons and their like are no doubt grist to Rumpole's mill." Wystan was starting on the summing up. "But it's the balance that *counts*. Now you'll be looking for a new Head of Chambers."

"Are we still looking?" My friend George Frobisher had the decency to ask. And Wystan told him, "I'd like you all to think it over carefully. And put your views to me in writing. We should all try and remember—it's the good of the Chambers that matters. Not the feelings, however deep they may be, of any particular person."

He then called on Albert's assistance to raise him to his feet, lifted his glass with an effort of pure will, and offered us a toast to the good of Chambers. I joined in, and drank deep, it having been a good thirty seconds since I had had a glass to my lips. As the bubbles exploded against the tongue, I noticed that the Featherstones were holding hands, and the brand new artificial silk was looking particularly delighted. Something, and perhaps not only his suspender belt, seemed to be giving him special pleasure.

Some weeks later, when I gave Hilda the news, she was deeply shocked.

"*Guthrie Featherstone!* Head of Chambers!" We were at breakfast. In fact, Nick was due back at school that day. He was neglecting his cornflakes and reading a book.

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"By general acclaim."

"I'm sorry." Hilda looked at me as if she'd just discovered I'd contracted an incurable disease.

"He can have the headaches—working out Albert's extraordinary bookkeeping system."

I thought for a moment, yes, I'd like to have been Head of Chambers, and then put the thought from me.

"If only you could have become a Q.C." She was now pouring me an unsolicited cup of coffee.

"Q.C.? C.T. That's enough to keep me busy."

"C.T.? Whatever's C.T.?"

"Counsel for the Timsons!" I tried to say it as proudly as I could. Then I reminded Nick that I'd promised to see him off at Liverpool Street, finished my cooling coffee, stood up, and took a glance at the book that was absorbing him, expecting it to be, perhaps, that spine-chilling adventure relating to the Footprints of an Enormous Hound. To my amazement the shocker in question was entitled simply *Studies in Sociology*.

"It's interesting." Nick sounded apologetic.

"You astonish me."

"Old Bagnold was talking about what I should read if I get into Oxford."

"Of course you're going to read law, Nick. We're going to keep it in the family." Hilda the barrister's daughter was clearing away deafeningly.

"I thought perhaps P.P.E. and then go on to Sociology." Nick sounded curiously confident. Before Hilda could get in another word, I made my position clear.

"P.P.E., that's very good, Nick! That's very good indeed! For God's sake, let's stop keeping things in the family!"

Later, as we walked across the barren stretches of Liverpool Street Station, with my son in his school uniform and me in my old striped trousers and black jacket, I tried to explain what I meant.

"That's what's wrong, Nick. That's the devil of it! They're being born around us all the time. Little Mr. Justice Everglades, little Timsons, little Guthrie Featherstones. All being set off to follow in father's footsteps." We were at the barrier, shaking hands awkwardly. "Let's have no more of that—no more following in father's footsteps. No more."

Nick smiled, although I have no idea if he understood what I was trying to say. I'm not totally sure that I understood it, either. Then

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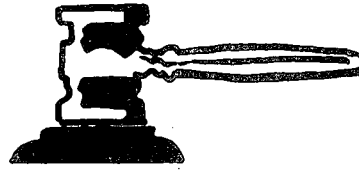
the train removed him from me. I waved for a little, but he didn't wave back. That sort of thing is embarrassing for a boy. I lit a small cigar and went by tube to the Bailey. I was doing a long firm fraud then—a particularly nasty business, out of which I got a certain amount of harmless fun.



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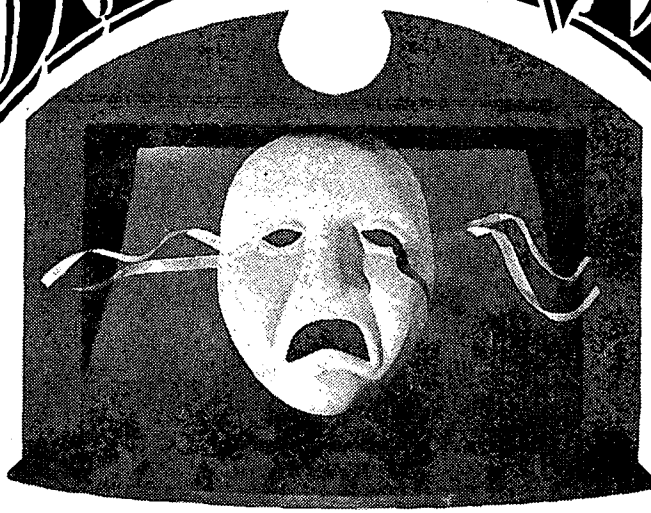

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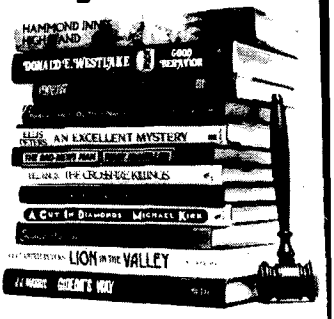

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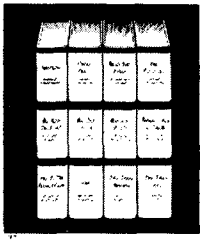

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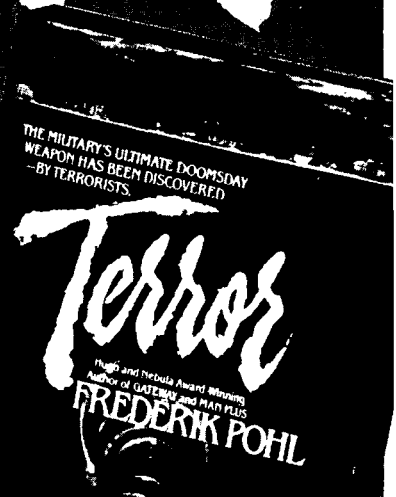
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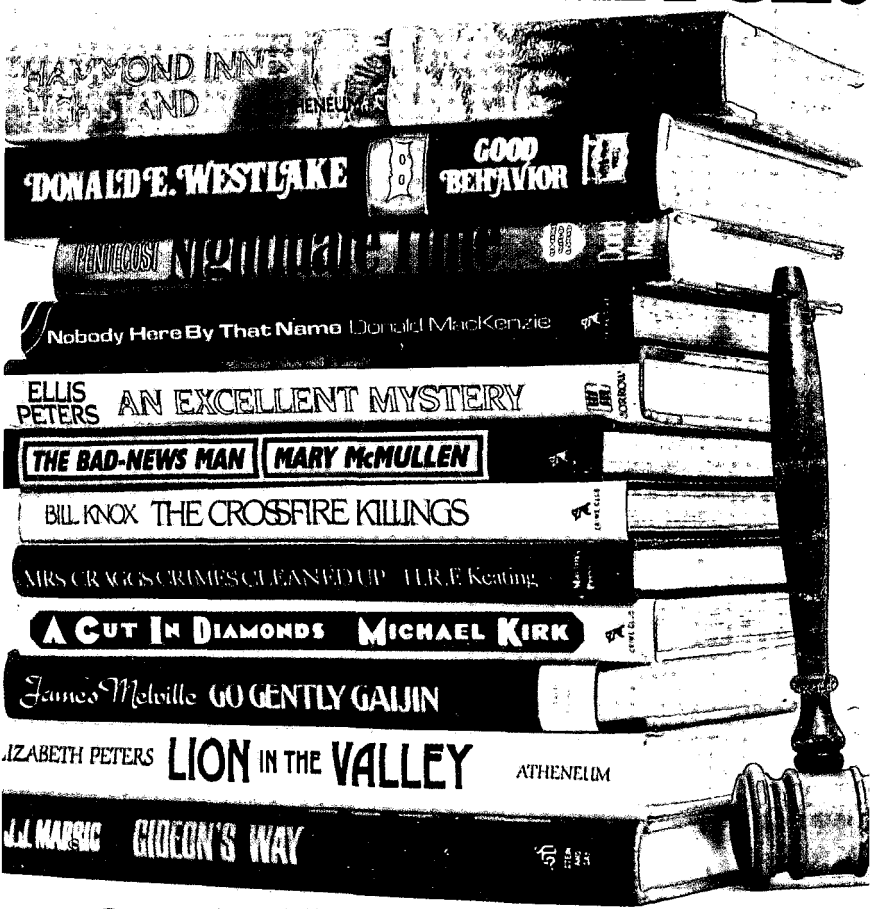

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